scenes from Cranford arranged for dramatic performance

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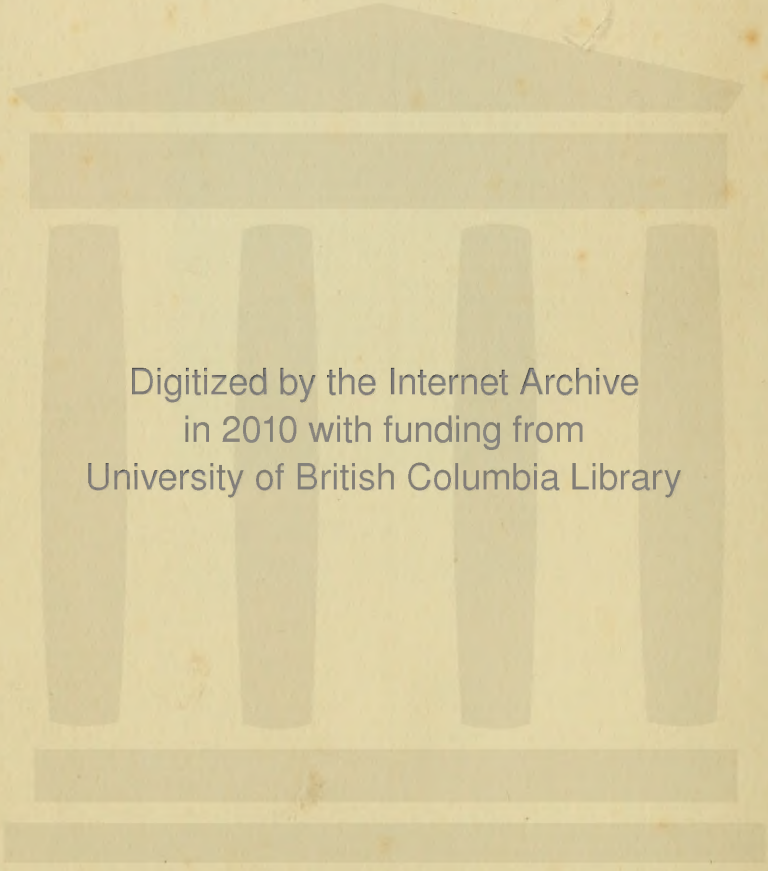

SCENES FROM CRANFORD

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ARRANGED FOR DRAMATIC PERFORMANCE

BY BEATRICE HATCH

WITH A PREFACE BY
MR. EDWARD COMPTON

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PREFACE

THE interest of *Cranford* is, it would seem, immortal, being intensely human. Its vogue to-day is wider than ever. The present generation has learned how well it lends itself to the most charming illustrations, and the newest surprise which it has for us is its capability of dramatization.

The following scenes, which have been carefully arranged from its pages, will be found, it is believed, still further to widen its popularity. Where possible, the original text has been adhered to, and where some amplification was necessary, the true spirit of *Cranford* still breathes. Our old friends, Miss Matty and Miss Pole, with the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson, Mrs. Forrester, and the rest, when they appear before us in dialogue suitably costumed, do but quicken the respect we have always felt for them, and kindle a still more living regard. These characters have nothing to fear and everything to gain from a closer acquaintanceship.

PREFACE

Although now for the first time offered to the public, it should be stated that these scenes have been repeatedly acted, and always with the same unmistakable success. For this they depend, it is true, not so much on incident as on delicacy of interpretation and strict faithfulness in detail. To help in obtaining the proper effect, some suggestions will be found to prelude each scene, and it will be well for the acting manager, unless previously thoroughly saturated with the spirit of *Cranford*, to make himself master of these before attempting any representations.

It only remains for me to say with what true dramatic instinct the compiler, Miss Hatch, has knitted together the scenes, and how excellently they will supply a constant requirement—a set of drawing-room plays, always immediately interesting and continuously entertaining, and to wish that this little volume may meet with the recognition which it so richly deserves.

EDWARD COMPTON.

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South Kensington.

HINTS TO PERFORMERS

Pictures.—In attempting to act the following scenes it should be borne in mind that our object is to present to the audience not so much a "play" as a series of "pictures." There is no plot—no special incident to be enacted. The scenes are intended to furnish realistic illustrations of the life at *Cranford* in the quaint simplicity which has rendered it famous. Careful attention should be given to details of dress, furniture and manners of the time, if the pictures are to be faithfully represented.

Date.—We gather, from the allusions to Queen Adelaide, that the date of the main part of the story lies between 1830 and 1837. Other references help us in calculating the age of Miss Matty and her cotemporaries, e.g. in *Old Letters* we are told that the Rector of Cranford's marriage took place in 1774. From this we may conclude that Miss Matty was between fifty and sixty years of age when Miss Deborah died. It

is usual to imagine Miss Pole a few years younger, and Mary Smith was probably under thirty. Mrs. Forrester is spoken of as "a gentle, meek old lady."

Characters.—It is hardly necessary here to describe the different characteristics of the *Cranford* ladies. They are best learnt by acquaintance with Mrs. Gaskell's own account of them. "Each has her own individuality, not to say eccentricity," we read, and those who undertake to portray the vivacious Miss Pole, or gentle Miss Matty, or any other of the "Amazons," must first learn what their individualities are, and arrange her manners and dress accordingly. A few hints are given in the list of characters for the Card-Party Scene which may be of use in this respect. For instance, only a small, slight figure could play the part of Miss Matty. The delicate and somewhat timid appearance and courteous manner of the little old gentlewoman are the very antithesis of the "fat and inert" Honourable Mrs. Jamieson. Miss Pole's voice must be brisk and sharp, and all her movements quick and energetic. Here again this figure in the picture must be carefully chosen. There was nothing "slow" in the nature

of good Miss Pole, and if her costumes are gayer and more exaggerated than the rest, she is never really wanting in good taste. Mary Smith is the only young figure in the group. She is quiet, sympathetic, and bright in manner.

Fashions.—In order to get a distinct idea of the fashions of 1830–7 it is well to get hold of some pictures in old illustrated magazines of that date, especially such as have coloured fashion plates. Mr. Hugh Thompson's charming drawings in *Cranford*, published by Messrs. Macmillan, are also very useful as a guide to the amateur in making up her costumes.

My own impression is, however, that we shall be right in dressing our ladies rather behind the times. They were "very independent of fashion." The chief expenditure in *Cranford* was on caps. "If the heads were buried in smart new caps, the ladies cared not what became of their bodies," writes Mrs. Gaskell. For the great occasion of a card-party they were content with "old gowns, white and venerable collars, . . . old brooches for a permanent ornament, and new caps to suit the fashion of the day."

Caps.—The caps were made of muslin or tulle. They were usually large, and covered the whole of the back of the head like a close bonnet. Some evening caps had small crowns that left the lower part of the back of the head uncovered. Wide embroidered tulle or scalloped "blond" gathered into a ruche, or a double row of lace, formed the edging. The trimming in front was thrown far back and supported by small flowers or ribbons immediately over the face. Ribbons were displayed in innumerable variety. Sometimes they were twisted into two circles round the cap and fastened at the side with a bow. Bows, or "artichoke knots" of cut ends, also ornamented the back of the crown. A twisted band of ribbon crossed the forehead and terminated on each side in a light bow under the upstanding border in front. Some ribbons were cut out in the shape of leaves. A cap of that period is described as having "a sort of small cockade of rose-coloured gauze ribbon iced, which was placed on the forehead and supported a trimming of British point lace." Lappets and "brides," which fastened under the chin, were very common in 1833 and later.

Turbans were made of silk or velvet, ornamented with an ostrich plume and a brooch. They were evidently not common in *Cranford*, and Miss Matty's ambition for a sea-green turban such as Queen Adelaide wore was not gratified. Miss Betty Barker, the ex-milliner, might wear one at her card-party ; and the different styles of caps on that occasion will help greatly in denoting the different characters. For instance, Mrs. Jamieson must be made to look pompous and vulgar, and although she wore widow's caps, bows and streamers of purple ribbons might be allowed. Miss Matty's cap should be quiet, elderly, and not too much trimmed. Mrs. Forrester's also would not be too elaborate ; but Miss Pole's head-dress might be rather exaggerated and as smart as possible. A bunch of ostrich tips and a ribbon bow were sometimes fastened into the hair for evening wear. The hair in all cases is parted in front, with side curls. At the back it is turned up very high, and elevated into one smooth or plaited loop. Mary Smith would wear no cap, but a ribbon or bow if necessary.

Dresses.—Cashmere, merino, foulard and

" woollen muslin " were among the favourite materials for dresses in 1833. Washing prints were also worn in the summer by the *Cranford* ladies, when they were not occupied in wearing out their old gowns. Black or dark grounds, flowered in various colours, were much in vogue. The skirts were made very wide, seven breadths being an ordinary amount to use. Before 1837 flounces were not common. Bodices had plain sloping shoulders, the sleeves widening out enormously about half-way between the shoulder and elbow, and ending in a tight wristband. A large buckle was often worn to terminate the waist. The bodices were cut away at the neck, and a pleated cambric or muslin chemisette was worn inside. Large embroidered or lace collars were also worn. A broad ribbon was fastened round the neck in the cravat style, with a bow and ends in front.

For outdoor wear *redingotes* were much favoured. These were made like an entire dress, but were left open up the front of the skirt, to display the underskirt. A smart redingote is described in the *Beau Monde Magazine* as being of " light silk, edged with black blond, made like a tunic,

and worn over an embroidered dress. The skirt is open on the side, and lined with green, straw or cherry-coloured sarcenet." A simpler one of this pattern might be worn by Miss Pole in a *Morning Call.*

Pelerines were quite as much worn, and would be easier for the amateur to construct. They were like plain tippets, straight or rounded behind, and widening over the shoulders. Some had short ends in front, but the majority had long lappels which reached almost to the bottom of the skirt. Occasionally they were cut in pointed dents all round. Others were edged with a narrow black lace, or merely a wide hem.

Bonnets.—The bonnets, or hats, as they were often called in spite of their strings, are an all-important item in our list. With an illustration to copy, it is not difficult for a performer to manufacture a bonnet for herself. They are either of straw, or of buckram covered with silk, satin, or velvet. The crowns are small, and the brims wide and open, and flattened horizontally over the forehead. The material usually known as "collar stiffening" makes admirable bonnets. If straw is preferred, a wide-brimmed hat may be used, the back of the brim

being cut away and a false crown made and joined on. The join can be hidden by a ribbon put plainly round the crown. Ribbon bows, and ostrich feathers standing erect, make the most effective trimming for Mrs. Jamieson or Miss Pole. The simpler bonnets have straight bands of ribbon only.

Fans, reticules, mittens, tiny parasols and other accessories may be freely added to complete the toilet.

Furniture.—The furniture of Miss Matty's house had probably belonged to a previous generation, and may have dated still further back than the rector's marriage in 1774. Anything that belongs to the latter part of the eighteenth century would therefore be correct for our arrangement of the *Cranford* parlours. But the ordinary amateur performer has usually to content himself with a very small stage, and such furniture as can be easily borrowed. A few Chippendale chairs and tables are generally obtainable, and these should be stiffly set round the room. Old china, silhouettes in small frames, worked firescreens, straight vases to hold coloured paper "spills"—all these will add effect to the pictures we endeavour to represent. Should our re-

sources be very much limited, it is better to play the scenes with a background of screens and a few pieces of the most old-fashioned furniture that can be procured, than to attempt them with too modern surroundings. The costumes and the acting are of the first importance, but even these, however excellent, may look ridiculously out of place with inconsistent staging.

Directions.—The directions which are given for costumes at the beginning of each scene are suggestions only. So long as the main outlines are followed, the details as to colour, etc., can of course be varied according to resources. The object is to give ideas to those who are not entirely familiar with *Cranford* fashions, and somewhat to direct the style which characterizes the individuals.

Extracts from the book are quoted before each scene. These will help to explain the circumstances, and to describe the situation which the scene is intended to illustrate.

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A Card-Party

[*This scene is made up of descriptions of several card-parties in* CRANFORD, *with a view to illustrating a characteristic gathering.*]

Time of performance : twenty-five minutes.

CHARACTERS

MISS BETTY BARKER

[Retired milliner ; dressed finer than the rest. Bright flowered silk gown ; elaborate turban and ostrich plume. Deferential manner.]

MISS MATILDA JENKYNS

[Small and refined ; age about fifty-five. Grey silk gown ; embroidered white muslin collar. White tulle cap trimmed sea-green ribbons. Grey side curls. Spectacles.]

MISS POLE

[Thin figure, erect and vivacious. Gay

flowered muslin gown, trimmed narrow gauze ribbon; white net undersleeves and chemisette. Tulle cap, trimmed cherry ribbons and ostrich tips. Seven brooches in dress, cap, etc. Brown ringlets. Black mittens. Reticule and knitting.]

THE HONOURABLE MRS. JAMIESON

[Large, stout and red-faced. Apathetic manner. Full black silk dress. Indian embroidered shawl. Close muslin cap tied under the chin with purple ribbons. Carries a white, woolly dog.]

MRS. FORRESTER

[Widow of an officer; gentle in appearance and manner. Blonde ringlets turning grey. Rather shabbily dressed in lavender and white foulard. Old lace collar, and cap trimmed lavender.]

PEGGY

[Blue spotted cotton dress to ankles. Muslin chemisette and apron. Muslin close cap with narrow blue ribbon streamers.]

A CARD-PARTY

Scene: Miss Betty Barker's parlour. Room set stiffly. Large armchair C.; smaller one near it; sofa R., with tray underneath. Card-table L., with candles and packs of cards; four small chairs arranged round it. Table to hold tea-tray behind sofa R. Door R. Newspaper paths on floor from the door to each chair.

"Card-tables with green baize tops were set out. Candles and clean packs of cards were arranged on each table. The fire was made up; the neat maidservant had received her last directions; and there we stood, dressed in our best, each with a candle-lighter in our hands, ready to dart at the candles as soon as the first knock came. Parties in Cranford were solemn festivities, making the ladies feel gravely elated as they sat together in their best dresses. . . .The tea-trays were placed each on the middle of a card-table. The china was delicate egg-shell; the old-fashioned silver glittered with polishing; but the eatables were of the slightest description. It was considered 'vulgar' to give anything expensive in the way of eatable or drinkable at the evening entertainments. Wafer

bread and butter and sponge biscuits were all that the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson gave, and she was sister-in-law to the late Earl of Glenmire, although she did practise such elegant economy. . . .

"The Cranfordians had that kindly *esprit de corps* which made them overlook all deficiencies in success when some among them tried to conceal their poverty. When, for instance, . . . the little maiden disturbed the ladies on the sofa by a request that she might get the tea-tray out from underneath, every one took this novel proceeding as the most natural thing in the world, and talked on about household forms and ceremonies as if we all believed that our hostess had a regular servants' hall . . . instead of the one little charity-school maiden, whose short ruddy arms could never have been strong enough to carry the tray upstairs if she had not been assisted in private by her mistress, who now sat in state, pretending not to know what cakes were sent up, though she knew, and we knew, and she knew that we knew, she had been busy all the morning making tea-bread and sponge cakes. . . .

"The place of pre-eminence was, of

course, reserved for the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson. Kind, gentle, shabbily-dressed Mrs. Forrester was conducted to the second place of honour—a seat arranged something like Prince Albert's near the Queen's—good, but not so good."

Miss Barker. Now, Peggy, mind! At the sound of the first knock, be ready to dart at the candle, and light it, and then run to the door.

Peggy. Yes, ma'am.

(*Knock heard without. They hurriedly light the candles, and Peggy runs out.*)

Miss Barker (*calling after her*). Wait, Peggy, wait till I've just arranged my cap again. When I cough, open the door. I'll not be a minute. (*Arranges her cap, and gives finishing touches to the chairs, etc. Coughs loudly, "a noise between a sneeze and a crow."*)

Peggy (*poking her head in at the door. In a loud whisper*). It's Miss Matilda Jenkyns, ma'am! She's just taking off her calash, and unpinning her dress, ma'am.

Miss Barker. Hush, Peggy! Run and show the ladies into the parlour.

Peggy (*announcing*). Miss Matilda Jenkyns.

(*Enter Miss Matilda Jenkyns.*)

Miss Barker. Dear Miss Matilda, this is indeed an honour. I trust you came in the sedan. Will you please be seated *here*, ma'am (*motioning her to sofa*)? I am reserving *this* chair for the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson.

Miss Matty. Mrs. Jamieson is coming, I think you said?

Miss Barker. Yes. Mrs. Jamieson most kindly and condescendingly said she would be happy to come. One little stipulation she made, that she should bring Carlo. I told her that if I had a weakness it was for dogs.

Miss Matty. And Miss Pole?

Miss Barker. Yes; I have asked Miss Pole. Of course, I could not think of asking her until I had asked *you*, madam—the Rector's daughter, madam. Believe me, I do not forget the situation my father held under yours.

Miss Matty. And Mrs. Forrester, of course?

Miss Barker. And Mrs. Forrester. I went, in fact, to her before I went to Miss Pole. Although her circumstances are changed, madam, she was born a Tyrrell,

and we can never forget her alliance to the Bigges, of Bigelow Hall.

MISS MATTY. And she is a very good card-player. Mrs. Fitz-Adam—I suppose——

MISS BARKER. No, madam. I must draw a line somewhere. Mrs. Jamieson would not, I think, like to meet Mrs. Fitz-Adam. I have the greatest respect for Mrs. Fitz-Adam—but I cannot think her fit society for such ladies as Mrs. Jamieson and Miss Matilda Jenkyns. (*Miss B. bows to Miss M. and purses up her mouth, adding with dignity*): I understand the difference in ranks. I begged them to come as near half-past six, to my little dwelling, as possible. Mrs. Jamieson dines at five, but has kindly promised not to delay her visit beyond that time, half-past six.

PEGGY (*announcing*). Mrs. Forrester and Miss Pole.

MISS POLE (*outside*). After you, ma'am. (*Enter Mrs. Forrester, followed by Miss Pole.*)

MISS BARKER. This is truly gratifying, Mrs. Forrester. Allow me to offer you this chair, ma'am (*conducting her to the second place of honour*). And Miss Pole, will you be seated here? You have brought your knitting, I see.

MISS POLE (*sitting beside Miss M. on sofa*). Yes, I wished to show Miss Matty a new stitch.

MISS BARKER (*turning to Mrs. Forrester*). I am expecting Mrs. Jamieson to arrive very soon.

MISS POLE (*to Miss Matty*). By the bye, I chanced to go into Johnson's this morning, and he has some very nice silks. You really should go and see them. There is a lilac with yellow spots, and a maize, and a sea-green. And he tells me that turbans are still likely to be worn. He showed me a very genteel lavender turban, which he says is something like one Queen Adelaide wears.

(*Enter Peggy.*)

PEGGY. If you please, ladies, I am sorry to disturb you, but may I get the tea-tray from underneath the sofa ?

(*Miss Matty and Miss Pole rise, but continue talking quite unconcernedly.*)

MISS POLE. I thought you would just like to know.

MISS MATTY. Thank you. Yes, I must go and see the silks. I wonder if he has a crimson ; it would be so warm in winter. But spring is coming on, you know. I wish I could have a gown for every season. How-

ever, it would give me a great deal of trouble to take care of them if I had them.

(*During Miss Matty's speech Peggy tries to attract Miss B.'s attention by beckonings and side whispers as she goes out. Miss B. frowns and shakes her head, but presently slips out of the room after her.*)

Miss Pole (*knitting*). Miss Betty told me it was to be a choice and select few.

Miss Matty. Yes, so she said to me. Not even Mrs. Fitz-Adam. I really do not know whether or not we should call on Mrs. Fitz-Adam. I dislike her brother's name so very much—Mr. Hoggins, it is so coarse; but then, as poor dear Deborah used to say, if he changed it to *Piggins* it would not be much better.

Miss Pole (*emphatically*). Well, I do not care to know what Mr. Fitz-Adam was, but when Mrs. Fitz-Adam reappeared in Cranford, as bold as a lion, a well-to-do widow, in rustling black silk, so soon after her husband's death, all I can say is I think *bombazine* would have shown a deeper sense of her loss.

Mrs. Forrester. I have always understood that Fitz meant something aristocratic. No one who had not some good

blood in their veins would dare to be called Fitz. There is a deal in a name. I had a cousin who spelt his name with two little ff's—f-f-o-u-l-k-e-s.—ffoulkes; and he always looked down upon capital letters, and said they belonged to lately-invented families. I was afraid he would die a bachelor, he was so very choice. When he met with a Mrs. ffaringdon—two little ff's—at a watering place, he took to her immediately, and a very pretty genteel woman she was—a widow, with a very good fortune, and my cousin, Mr. ffoulkes, married her; and it was all owing to her two little ff's.

Miss Matty. But Mrs. Fitz-Adams is not likely to meet with a Mr. Fitz anything in Cranford, so *that* could not have been her motive for settling here. It may have been the hope of being admitted into the society of the place.

Mrs. Forrester. That would certainly be a very agreeable rise for the former Miss Hoggins.

Miss Matty. Yes, indeed; and if this has been her hope, it would be cruel to disappoint her.

Miss Pole. And as most of the ladies of good family in Cranford are elderly spinsters,

or widows without children, if we do not relax a little, and become less exclusive, by-and-by we shall have no society at all.

(*Enter Miss Betty Barker, with Mrs. Jamieson.*)

MISS BARKER. Ladies, Mrs. Jamieson!

(*All rise and curtsey as she is solemnly conducted to her seat.*)

MISS BARKER (*aside*). This is very gratifying, very gratifying indeed. How I wish my poor sister had been alive to see this day.

(*Enter Peggy with the tea-tray.*)

MISS BARKER. Why, Peggy, what have you brought us? Now, ladies, allow me to give you some tea.

(*She hands cups of tea round to the company, always serving Mrs. Jamieson first. Exit Peggy.*)

MRS. FORRESTER. And is it really true, Mrs. Jamieson, that your house has been attacked?

MRS. JAMIESON. Well, at least there were men's footsteps to be seen on the flower borders, underneath the kitchen windows, and Carlo barked all through the night, as if strangers were abroad.

(*Mrs. Jamieson eats seed cake slowly and considerately, and presently begins to nod.*)

Miss Pole (*nodding her head with great satisfaction*). I was sure we should hear of something happening in Cranford, and we have heard. It was clear enough the gang had first proposed to attack my house, but when they saw that Betty and I were on our guard they changed their tactics and went to Mrs. Jamieson's; and no one knows what might have happened if Carlo had not barked, like a good dog as he was. My house is so far from any neighbours, I do not believe we should be heard if we screamed ever so.

Miss Barker. But what has alarmed you so much. Have you seen any men lurking about the house?

Miss Pole. Oh, yes. Two very bad looking men have gone three times past the house very slowly; and an Irish beggar-woman came, and all but forced her way in past Betty, saying that her children were starving, and she must speak to the mistress. You see, she said "mistress," though there was a man's hat hanging up in the hall, for I begged one of Mr. Hoggins' worn-out hats for that purpose, and it would have been more natural to have said "master." But Betty shut the door in her face,

and came up to me, and we got the spoons together, and sat in the parlour window watching till we saw Thomas Jones going from his work, when we called to him and asked him to take care of us into the town. And we took my plate as far as Miss Matilda Jenkyns' house, who was good enough to let us stay the night.

Miss Matty. I was very glad to have you with me, though after the rumours I had heard I was afraid to let Martha open the door until I had peeped through an upstairs window, and I had a footstool ready to drop down on his head, in case a man should look up at me with a face covered with black crape.

Mrs. Forrester. But, Miss Pole, what were the men like who went past your house ?

Miss Pole. A regular murderous gang. One was tall, a perfect giant, with black hair hanging over his forehead and down his back. The other was short and broad, and a hump sprouted out on his shoulder. He had red, carroty hair, and I am almost sure he had a cast in his eye—a decided squint. As for the woman, her eyes glared, and she was very masculine looking, a per-

fect virago—most probably she was a man dressed up in woman's clothes.

Miss Barker. In my opinion these robberies could never have been committed by a Cranford person. Cranford is far too genteel and well bred. It must have been a stranger, or strangers, who brought this disgrace upon the town. But let us now have a game of Preference (*goes to card-table*). Who will take a hand? Mrs. Forrester? and Miss Pole? and Miss Matilda? and Mrs. Jamieson will make a fourth. (*Loud snore from Mrs. Jamieson. They all rise and look at her.*) Oh, I think Mrs. Jamieson must be asleep. This is very gratifying indeed, to see how completely Mrs. Jamieson feels at home in my poor little dwelling. She could not have paid me a greater compliment. I declare I do not know spadille from manille, but I shall be happy to take a hand.

(*The ladies seat themselves round the card-table; Miss Pole, at the head, deals the cards out.*)

Miss Matty. They tell me that carts are to be seen going about in the dead of the night, drawn by horses shod with felt, and guarded by men in dark clothes, going

round the town no doubt in search of some unwatched house or some unfastened door. I go round the house every night with the poker, and Martha follows with the hearth brush, for I confess I am an arrant coward; and lately I have gone the rounds as early as half-past six, and retire to bed soon after seven, in order to get the night over the sooner.

MRS. FORRESTER. And a very wise precaution indeed; though one never knows where one is safe, after Mr. Hoggins having been attacked at his own door only yesterday by two ruffians, who were concealed in the shadow of the porch, and they so effectually silenced him that he was robbed in the interval between his ringing the bell and his servant's answering it.

MISS POLE. Yes, I for one believe it; though, after all, Mr. Hoggins is too much of the man to *own* that he was robbed last night.

MISS BARKER, MRS. FORRESTER and MISS MATTY. Not robbed?

MISS POLE. Don't tell me. I believe he *was* robbed, just as Betty told me, and he is ashamed to own it; and, to be sure, it was very silly of him to be robbed just at

his own door. I dare say he feels that such a thing will not raise him in the eyes of Cranford society, and he is anxious to conceal it—but he need not have tried to impose upon me by saying I must have heard an exaggerated account of some petty theft of a neck of mutton, which, it seems, was stolen out of the safe in his yard last week. He had the impertinence to add, he believed that that was taken by the cat! I have no doubt, if I could get at the bottom of it, it was that Irishman dressed up in woman's clothes, that came spying about my house with the story about the starving children. I felt sure this robbery had been committed by my men, and I went this very morning to have my teeth examined, and to question Mr. Hoggins. Now, only think! There, I have undergone the risk of having one of my remaining teeth drawn (for one is terribly at the mercy of any surgeon-dentist, and I, for one, always speak them fair till I have got my mouth out of their clutches). Well, men will be men. Every mother's son of them wishes to be considered Samson and Solomon rolled into one—too strong ever to be beaten or discomfited—too wise ever to be outwitted.

If you will notice, they have always foreseen events, though they never tell one for one's warning before the events happen. My father was a man, and I know the sex pretty well.

MRS. FORRESTER and MISS MATTY. They are very incomprehensible, certainly.

MISS BARKER. Hush, ladies! if you please, hush! Mrs. Jamieson is asleep.

(*"The four ladies' heads, with niddle-noddling caps, nearly meet over the middle of the table in their eagerness to whisper quick enough and loud enough, and every now and then comes Miss Barker's 'Hush, ladies, if you please.'"*)

MISS POLE (*loud and suddenly*). Basto! ma'am! You have spadille, I believe.

(*At this the door is thrown wide open and Peggy enters, red with importance, carrying the supper tray, containing cherry brandy, glasses, jelly, etc. Mrs. Jamieson awakes with a start. Miss Barker runs across to side table and pours out glasses of cherry brandy which she offers to Mrs. Jamieson and Miss Pole first.*)

MRS. JAMIESON. I have been so interested in listening to all your amusing and agreeable conversation, though, to be sure,

the room was so light I was glad to keep my eyes shut.

MISS BARKER (*offering wineglass to Miss P.*). Just a little, leetle glass.

(*Miss P. shakes her head vehemently at first, but is soon persuaded to take it. Having tasted it she coughs a great deal.*)

MISS POLE. It's very strong. I do believe there's spirit in it. (*Finishes her wine with great relish.*)

MISS BARKER. Only a little drop—just necessary to make it keep. You know we put brandy paper over preserves to make them keep. I often feel tipsy myself from eating damson tart.

(*Miss B. continues to offer her delicacies to the company.*)

MRS. JAMIESON (*in a loud and important voice*). My sister-in-law, Lady Glenmire, is coming to stay with me.

(*A rustle of surprise among the company.*)

ALL. Indeed!

MRS. JAMIESON. She is coming next week.

ALL (*with increased interest*). Indeed!

MISS BARKER (*fetching cake for Carlo*). Poor, sweet Carlo! I'm forgetting him. Poor ittie doggie, it shall have its supper it shall.

(*Enter Peggy.*)

PEGGY. Mrs. Jamieson's Mr. Mulliner has come, please, ma'am.

(*Mrs. Jamieson finishes her supper with great dispatch, and rises hurriedly.*)

MRS. JAMIESON. I am sorry to break up our interesting party, ladies, but I am afraid I must say good-night. Mulliner does not like to be kept waiting.

MISS BARKER. Allow me to assist you, ma'am.

(*All rise and curtsey. Exit Mrs. Jamieson and Miss Barker.*)

MRS. FORRESTER. I think I must be getting home, too. I wonder if my maid has come with the lantern. I do not like to be out late while the roads are so unsafe.

MISS MATTY. No, Mrs. Forrester; it would be more prudent to get home early. I never feel safe till I am in bed. Ever since I was a girl I have dreaded being caught, just as I am getting into bed, by my last leg, by some one concealed under the bed. When I was younger and more active, I used to take a flying leap from a distance, and so bring both my legs up safely into bed at once; but that always annoyed my sister Deborah, who piqued

herself upon getting into bed gracefully, and so I gave it up. But now the old terror will often come upon me, especially since Miss Pole's house was attacked, and yet it is very unpleasant to think of looking under a bed and seeing a man concealed, with a great fierce face staring out at you, and so I have bethought myself of something.

MISS POLE. Ah, indeed ? Pray tell us.

MISS MATTY. Well, I told Martha to buy me a penny ball, such as children play with, and now I roll this ball under the bed every night. If it comes out on the other side, well and good ; if not, I always take care to have my hand on the bell rope, and mean to call out "John" and "Harry," to pretend there are men servants who will answer my ring.

MRS. FORRESTER and MISS POLE. Very ingenious, to be sure !

("*Miss M. sinks back into satisfied silence, with a look at Mrs. F. as if to ask for* her *private weakness.*" *Miss B. re-enters quietly.*)

MRS. FORRESTER. Well, I do not mind telling you that I have borrowed a boy from a neighbouring cottage, and I have promised his parents a hundredweight of coals at Christmas, and his supper every

evening, for the loan of him at nights. I instructed him in his possible duties when he first came, and, finding him sensible, I have given him the sword that belonged to my late husband, the Major, and I have desired him to put it very carefully behind his pillow at night, turning the edge towards the head of the pillow. He is a sharp lad, I am sure, for he spied out the Major's cocked hat, and said if he might have that to wear, he was sure he could frighten two Englishmen, or four Frenchmen, any day: But I impressed on him that he was to lose no time in putting on hats or anything else ; but, if he heard any noise, he was to run at it with his drawn sword.

Miss Pole. Are you not afraid that some accident might occur ? He might rush on Jenny when she was getting up, and have spitted her before he discovered that she was not a Frenchman.

Mrs. Forrester. I do not think that that is likely, for he is a very sound sleeper, and generally has to be well shaken or cold-pigged in the morning before we can rouse him. I sometimes think that such dead sleep must be owing to the hearty suppers the poor lad eats, for he is half-starved at

home, and I told Jenny to see that he gets a good meal at night.

MISS BARKER. But what is your peculiar timidity, Mrs. Forrester? What do you think would really frighten you more than anything else?

MRS. FORRESTER (*in a sounding whisper, after a slight pause*). Ghosts!

(*She looks at Miss Pole in a challenging manner.*)

MISS POLE. Humph! I have read a good deal of Dr. Ferrier and Dr. Hibbert also, and I am quite convinced that spectral illusions and optical delusions, and such like, can generally be traced to indigestion.

MISS MATTY. Ah, but dear Miss Pole, there are ghosts *and* ghosts.

MRS. FORRESTER (*bridling up*). Yes, indeed! I think I ought to know the difference between ghosts and indigestion. Surely I, the widow of a major in the army, know what to be frightened at, and what not.

(*Enter Peggy.*)

PEGGY. If you please, ma'am, the sedan chair has come for Miss Matilda Jenkyns.

MISS BARKER. One moment, Miss Matilda; I will see if it can be brought inside my humble lobby.

(*Exit Miss Barker.*)

Miss Pole (*rising and beckoning back Peggy, who is following her mistress; cynically*). Peggy, have you ever seen a ghost ?

Peggy. Oh yes, ma'am ; please, ma'am, with my own eyes, not so many nights ago. It was in Darkness Lane, ma'am, the very lane you ladies go through on your way home.

Mrs. Forrester (*rising and nervously*). Now, Peggy, tell me, keep quite calm and tell me ; what did you see ?

Peggy. A lady, ma'am, all in white, and without her head.

(*Miss Pole regards her with withering scorn.*)

Miss Matty (*rising and coming towards Peggy*). Without her head, my dear ? Are you sure ?

Peggy. Yes, ma'am ; quite sure, ma'am ; and not only me, but many others have seen her too. She sits by the roadside, and wrings her hands, as if she was in deep grief, ma'am.

(*Mrs. Forrester looks at Miss Pole with an air of conscious triumph.*)

Miss Pole (*with withering scorn*). Indigestion !

MISS MATTY. Well, I'm glad I ordered the sedan. I'll give the men an extra sixpence to go very fast. (*Going towards door.*)

MRS. FORRESTER (*clutching Miss M.'s arm*). Don't leave me. I will walk by your chair; and could you not persuade them to take you by Headingley Causeway? The pavement in Darkness Lane jolts so, and you are not very strong.

(*Exit Mrs. Forrester and Miss Matty, followed by Peggy.*)

MISS POLE (*aside*). I'll give the men a shilling if they'll go by Headingley Causeway, and I will keep up with the chair too.

(*Exit Miss Pole hurriedly.*)

END OF SCENE.

Morning Calls

I. "YOUR LADYSHIP"

[MORNING CALLS *should be played in sequence. I. and II. are almost inseparable, and should follow each other with the shortest possible interval. They make a suitable addition to* A CARD-PARTY. *III. can, if preferred, stand alone.*]

Time of performance: ten minutes.

CHARACTERS

MISS MATTY

[Pale green striped cotton gown. Black silk apron; cap with yellow ribbons.]

MARY SMITH

[Plain morning dress of light muslin. Hair dressed high, with a comb at the back; curls parted in front.]

MRS. JAMIESON

[Purple merino gown; black silk pele-

rine. Large coal-scuttle black silk bonnet, trimmed ostrich plumes and ribbon.]

MISS POLE

[Green redingote, open in front, showing underskirt of straw-coloured muslin, flowered. Straw bonnet, trimmed green ribbon and pink ostrich feather.]

MARTHA

[Lilac print gown to ankles; white stockings; pleated cambric chemisette; white apron; white close-fitting muslin cap, square at the ears, with muslin ruche in front. Hair parted and worn over the ears.]

Scene: Miss Matty's parlour. Small table L.C., with coloured paper upon it; chairs on either side; chintz armchair R.C. Entrance R. Writing table near window L.

Miss Matty and Mary Smith making candle lighters at table L.C.

"Mrs. Jamieson came on a very unpolite errand. I notice that apathetic people have

more quiet impertinence than others; and Mrs. Jamieson came now to insinuate pretty plainly that she did not particularly wish that the Cranford ladies should call upon her sister-in-law. I can hardly say how she made this clear; for I grew very indignant and warm, while with slow deliberation she was explaining her wishes to Miss Matty, who, a true lady herself, could hardly understand the feeling which made Mrs. Jamieson wish to appear to her noble sister-in-law as if she only visited 'county' families. Miss Matty remained puzzled and perplexed long after I had found out the object of Mrs. Jamieson's visit.

"When she did understand the drift of the honourable lady's call, it was pretty to see with what quiet dignity she received the intimation thus uncourteously given. She was not in the least hurt; she was of too gentle a spirit for that; nor was she exactly conscious of disapproving of Mrs. Jamieson's conduct; but there was something of this feeling in her mind, I am sure, which made her pass from the subject to others in a less flurried and more composed manner than usual. Mrs. Jamieson was, indeed,

the more flurried of the two, and I could see she was glad to take her leave."

MARY. And who was at the party last night, Miss Matty ?

MISS MATTY. Oh, just our usual set, my dear. Mrs. Forrester, and Miss Pole, and Mrs. Jamieson. It was a pity you could not arrive in time for it, for Cranford is so quiet; we have not many attractions to offer our visitors. However, maybe we shall have another party before long, for Mrs. Jamieson told us she was expecting her sister-in-law, Lady Glenmire, to stay with her next week, and as we have none of us ever seen her she is sure to invite us all to drink tea with her.

MARTHA (*announcing*). Miss Pole, ma'am.

(*Enter Miss Pole.*)

MISS POLE. I thought I would just run in and see how you were after the party, and pay my respects to your new visitor, too.

(*They exchange greetings and sit down.*)

MISS MATTY. Well, and did you get home safe last night ? I declare I trembled as I sat inside the sedan chair to think of all the dangers we were running through.

MISS POLE. Oh, thank you, yes; *I* was

all right. You see I do not pay much heed to such stories: headless ladies, dressed in white, and so on. Our poor friend Mrs. Forrester is so nervous, and has such a terror of ghosts. It comes from living so much alone, and listening to the bug-a-boo stories of that Jenny of hers. But you heard what Mrs. Jamieson said about her sister-in-law, Lady Glenmire, did you not?

Miss Matty. Yes; I understood she will be coming to Cranford next week. We must go and call on her, of course, directly she arrives; and then, I suppose, Mrs. Jamieson will invite us to meet her at a little party.

Miss Pole. That is just what *I've* been thinking. And so, as I am just going to run down to Johnson's, I wondered whether there were any little commissions I could do for you in the way of shopping. For, I suppose we shall all like to have something new to put on when we go to meet her ladyship. By the way, you'll think I'm strangely ignorant, but, do you really know, I am puzzled how we ought to address Lady Glenmire. Do you say "your ladyship" where you would say "you" to a common person? I have been puzzling all morning;

and are we to say "my lady" instead of "ma'am"? Now, you knew Lady Arley. —Will you kindly tell me the most correct way of speaking to the peerage?

(*Miss Matty looks puzzled. She takes off her spectacles, and puts them on again.*)

Miss Matty. Well—really—I cannot remember how Lady Arley was addressed. It is so long ago. Dear! dear! how stupid I am! I don't think I ever saw her more than twice. I know we used to call Sir Peter "Sir Peter," but he came much oftener to see us than Lady Arley did. Deborah would have known in a minute. "My lady"—"your ladyship." It sounds very strange, and as if it was not natural. I never thought of it before, but now you have named it, I am all in a puzzle.

(*She goes on murmuring to herself "Lady Arley"—"Sir Peter"—"your ladyship," etc., getting more bewildered every minute.*)

Miss Pole (*rising*). Well, I really think I had better just go and tell Mrs. Forrester about our little difficulty. One sometimes grows nervous, and yet one would not have Lady Glenmire think we were quite ignorant of the etiquettes of high life in Cranford.

Miss Matty. And will you just step in

here, dear Miss Pole, as you come back, please, and tell me what you decide upon? Whatever you and Mrs. Forrester fix upon will be quite right, I'm sure.

(*Exit Miss Pole.*)

(*Miss Matty tries to recall the old forms of words, repeating softly to herself, "My ladyship"—no, "*YOUR *ladyship," etc.*)

MARY. Who is Lady Glenmire?

MISS MATTY. Oh, she's the widow of Mr. Jamieson—that's Mrs. Jamieson's late husband, you know—widow of his eldest brother. Mrs. Jamieson was a Miss Walker, daughter of Governor Walker. "Your ladyship." My dear, if they fix on that way of speaking, you must just let me practise a little on you first, for I shall feel so foolish and hot saying it the first time to Lady Glenmire.

(*Knock heard without.*)

MARY (*looking out of window*). Why, here is Mrs. Jamieson herself!

MISS MATTY. Mrs. Jamieson? Ah, no doubt she has come at once to invite us to drink tea with Lady Glenmire next week.

MARTHA (*announcing*). Mrs. Jamieson, if you please, ma'am.

(*Enter Mrs. Jamieson.*)

MISS MATTY. Oh, Mrs. Jamieson, how very kind of you to pay me a visit. You know my young friend Miss Smith, I think.

(*Mrs. J. makes a condescending bow to Mary S., who offers her a chair.*)

MRS. JAMIESON. I must not stop more than a few minutes, but I was anxious to see you, Miss Matilda. I think you may have heard me mention last night that my sister-in-law, Lady Glenmire, is coming to stay with me next week.

MISS MATTY. Yes; we are so much interested to hear it. Which day do you think she will arrive, for we should like to have the pleasure of calling on her as soon as possible, and welcoming her to Cranford?

MRS. JAMIESON. Oh, well, I am not quite sure which day she will arrive, because I suppose if it should turn very wet or stormy she might not like to travel all the way from Scotland.

MISS MATTY. Oh, no; of course not. Still, if we come on Thursday or Friday, perhaps she would be with you by then?

MRS. JAMIESON. I can hardly say. And she might be very tired after so long a journey, and not be able to see visitors.

MISS MATTY. Oh, we should not wish to tire her for the world. You would like us just to wait a day or two then, before coming to pay our respects?

MRS. JAMIESON (*slow and hesitatingly*). Well—the fact is—Miss Matilda—I thought I had better just come round and see you——

MARY (*aside, indignantly*). *I* see what she has come for.

MRS. JAMIESON. In fact—I think perhaps it would be best if you and the other Cranford ladies do *not* call upon Lady Glenmire.

MISS MATTY. Has she lost a relative lately, poor thing?

MRS. JAMIESON (*getting flurried*). No, no; she has not lost any of her relatives to my knowledge. But, you see, there will be a good many of my friends among the *county* people who will wish to meet her, and—and——

(*Miss Matty looks much puzzled.*)

MARY (*aside*). Rude woman! and dear Miss Matty cannot see her meaning.

(*Rises and goes to back of stage.*)

MRS. JAMIESON. Of course I shall be taking Lady Glenmire to visit the *county* families; you understand just how it is.

MARY (*aside*). Yes; you would wish your sister-in-law to think you only visit *county* families. Cranford people are not good enough.

MISS MATTY (*understanding at last, with gentle dignity*). Well, it must be as you wish, Mrs. Jamieson. We should have been very happy to make the acquaintance of Lady Glenmire, or any guest of yours; but, perhaps, as you say, she will have a great number to visit her.

MRS. JAMIESON (*loud and flurried*). Of course I don't mean any offence, Miss Matilda——

MISS MATTY. Oh, no, of course not. I hope Carlo is quite well?

MRS. JAMIESON. Yes, thank you. He is just a trifle hoarse with barking at the butcher's boy, but I shall give him some warm milk before he goes to bed. Come, Carlo, we must be going. Good morning, Miss Matilda. You quite understand, I hope, what I mean about Lady Glenmire. Of course she would have been very happy —but——

MISS MATTY. Oh, we quite understand, thank you. Mary, my dear, would you be so kind as to open the front door for Mrs.

Jamieson. Oh, never mind, Martha is there.

(*Exit Mrs. Jamieson.*)

MARY. Well! of all the ill-bred people——

MISS MATTY. Hush, my dear, I beg.

MARY. Dear Miss Matty, you were too gentle with her. I saw in a moment what she had come for, and I was so indignant I could hardly listen with patience.

(*Enter Miss Pole, red and indignant.*)

MISS POLE. Well! to be sure! You've had Mrs. Jamieson here, I find from Martha; and we are not to call on Lady Glenmire. Yes! I met Mrs. Jamieson, half-way between here and Mrs. Forrester's, and she told me. She took me so by surprise I had nothing to say. I wish I had thought of something very sharp and sarcastic; I dare say I shall to-night. And Lady Glenmire is but the widow of a Scotch baron after all! I went on to look at Mrs. Forrester's peerage, to see who this lady was that is to be kept under a glass case. Widow of a Scotch peer—never sat in the House of Lords—and as poor as Job, I dare say; and she—fifth daughter of some Mr. Campbell or other. You are the daughter of a rector, at any rate, and related to the Arleys; and

Sir Peter might have been Viscount Arley, every one says.

Miss Matty. Do not distress yourself about it, dear Miss Pole ; it does not really signify if Mrs. Jamieson does not wish us to visit her sister-in-law.

Miss Pole (*in full flow of anger*). And I went and ordered a new cap this morning to be quite ready. Mrs. Jamieson shall see if it is so easy to get me to make fourth at a pool when she has none of her fine Scotch relations with her.

(*Exit Miss Pole, Miss Matty in vain trying to soothe her. Mary S., who has remained in the background, comes forward and affectionately leads Miss M. to a chair.*)

End of Scene.

Morning Calls

II. "INVITATIONS."

CHARACTERS

Miss Matty Mary Smith Miss Pole Martha	same dresses as in I.

Scene : Miss Matty's parlour. Miss Matty seated in chintz armchair, reading *St. James' Chronicle*. Mary Smith at writing table, looking out of window.

"In coming out of church the first Sunday on which Lady Glenmire appeared in Cranford, we sedulously talked together, and turned our backs on Mrs. Jamieson and her guest. If we might not call on her, we would not even look at her, though we were dying with curiosity to know what she was like. We had the comfort of questioning Martha in the afternoon. Martha did

not belong to a sphere of society whose observation could be an implied compliment to Lady Glenmire, and Martha had made good use of her eyes. . . . Another Sunday passed away, and we still averted our eyes from Mrs. Jamieson and her guest, and made remarks to ourselves that we thought were very severe—almost too much so. Miss Matty was evidently uneasy at our sarcastic manner of speaking.

"Perhaps by this time Lady Glenmire had found out that Mrs. Jamieson's was not the gayest, liveliest house in the world; perhaps Mrs. Jamieson had found out that most of the county families were in London, and that those who remained in the country were not so alive as they might have been to the circumstance of Lady Glenmire being in their neighbourhood. Great events spring out of small causes, so I will not pretend to say what induced Mrs. Jamieson to alter her determination of excluding the Cranford adies, and send notes of invitation all round for a small party on the following Tuesday. Mr. Mulliner himself brought them round. He *would* always ignore the fact of there being a back door to any house, and gave a louder rat-tat than his mistress,

Mrs. Jamieson. He had three little notes, which he carried in a large basket, in order to impress his mistress with an idea of their great weight, though they might easily have gone into his waistcoat pocket.

"Miss Matty and I quietly decided we would have a previous engagement at home; it was the evening on which Miss Matty usually made candle-lighters of all the notes and letters of the week; for on Mondays her accounts were always made straight—not a penny owing from the week before; so, by a natural arrangement, making candle-lighters fell upon a Tuesday evening, and gave us a legitimate excuse for declining Mrs. Jamieson's invitation. But before our answer was written, in came Miss Pole, with an open note in her hand.

". . . Miss Pole, in addition to her delicacies of feeling, possessed a very smart cap, which she was anxious to show to an admiring world; and so she seemed to forget all her angry words uttered not a fortnight before, and to be ready to act on what she called the great Christian principle of 'Forgive and forget'; and she lectured dear Miss Matty so long on this head that she absolutely ended by assuring

her it was her duty, as a deceased rector's daughter, to buy a new cap and go to the party at Mrs. Jamieson's.

". . . The expenditure on dress in Cranford was principally in that one article referred to. If the heads were buried in smart new caps the ladies were like ostriches, and cared not what became of their bodies."

MARY. What a pompous creature that man-servant of Mrs. Jamieson's is, to be sure. There he goes now, on an errand, I suppose, for his mistress, looking *very* important, and with such a large basket. Oh! he has stopped at this door, and he is taking something out of his basket. What can it be?

(*Enter Martha, with a small note.*)

MARTHA. A note for you, ma'am. Mr. Mulliner brought it, from Mrs. Jamieson. I'd like to tell him his place—coming to the front door instead of the back, and giving a louder knock than his mistress. And he had three little notes, ma'am, in that great basket. Seems to me they might have gone in his waistcoat pocket, instead of all *that* fuss.

(*Exit Martha.*)

MISS MATTY. It is from Mrs. Jamieson. An invitation, after all, to a small party on Tuesday next to meet Lady Glenmire.

MARY. Ah, perhaps by this time Lady Glenmire has found out that Mrs. Jamieson's house is not the gayest, liveliest house in the world.

MISS MATTY. Of course we shall not accept.

MARY. Oh, no; how could we, after Mrs. Jamieson's rudeness in telling you not to call upon her sister-in-law? We must have a previous engagement.

MISS MATTY. It is our evening for making candle-lighters, so I do not think we *could* go.

MARY. Do you always make candle-lighters on Tuesdays?

MISS MATTY. Well, you see, on *Mondays* I always make my accounts straight; so of course making my candle-lighters falls to *Tuesday* evenings.

MARY. Then we can *quite* easily decline.

(*Enter Miss Pole, with an open note in her hand.*)

MISS POLE (*cheerfully*). So! Ah! I see you have got your note, too. Better late than never. I could have told my Lady

Glenmire she would be glad enough of our society before a fortnight was over.

MISS MATTY. Yes; we are asked for Tuesday evening. And perhaps you would just kindly bring your work across and drink tea with us that night. It is my usual regular time for looking over the last week's bills, and notes, and letters, and making candle-lighters of them, but that does not seem quite reason enough for saying I have a previous engagement at home, though I meant to make it do. Now, if you would come, my conscience would be quite at ease; and, luckily, the note is not written yet.

(*Miss Pole's countenance changes while Miss Matty is speaking. Mary has retired to writing table at back.*)

MISS POLE. Don't you mean to go, then?

MISS MATTY (*quietly*). Oh, no! You don't either, I suppose?

MISS POLE. I don't know. Yes, I think I do. (*Miss Matty looks surprised.*) You see, one would not like Mrs. Jamieson to think that anything she could do, or say, was of consequence enough to give offence; it would be a kind of letting down of our-

selves that I, for one, should not like. It would be too flattering to Mrs. Jamieson if we allowed her to suppose that what she had said affected us a week, nay, ten days, afterwards.

Miss Matty. Well! I suppose it is wrong to be hurt and annoyed so long about anything; and, perhaps, after all, she did not mean to vex us. But I must say I could not have brought myself to say the things Mrs. Jamieson did about our not calling. I really don't think I shall go.

Miss Pole. Oh, come! Miss Matty, you must go. You know our friend Mrs. Jamieson is much more phlegmatic than most people, and does not enter into the little delicacies of feeling which you possess in so remarkable a degree.

Miss Matty (*innocently*). I thought you possessed them too, that day Mrs. Jamieson called to tell us not to go.

Miss Pole. My dear Miss Matty, surely we should all be ready to act on the great Christian principle of "Forgive and forget."

Miss Matty. Oh, I do not wish to entertain feelings of resentment and unwillingness to forgive; far from it.

Miss Pole. I assure you it is your duty,

positively your duty, as a deceased rector's daughter, to buy a new cap, and go to the party at Mrs. Jamieson's.

MISS MATTY. Well, well; if you really think it my *duty*. I wonder what Deborah would have done.

MISS POLE. *I* have got a new cap, which I am anxious to show you, and I hope you will admire it. With a nice, smart, new cap, you see it does not so much matter if our gowns are old.

MISS MATTY. Oh, yes; that is true enough. What does it matter how we dress here in Cranford, where everybody knows us? As Miss Betty Barker once expressed it, the ladies of Cranford always dress with chaste elegance and propriety.

MISS POLE. Yes, but you should have a new cap for visiting the peerage. I wonder what Lady Glenmire is like. You did not happen to see what she had on on Sunday, did you?

MISS MATTY. Oh, no; of course we turned our backs when Mrs. Jamieson and her guest came out of church. If we might not call on her, we would not even look at her; that would have been paying her too much of a compliment.

MARY (*from writing table at back*). But Martha made good use of her eyes, and I questioned her in the afternoon.

MISS POLE. Oh, indeed! And what did she say?

MISS MATTY. She shall tell us herself. (*Calls*): Martha!

(*Enter Martha.*)

MISS MATTY. Did you notice, Martha, how Lady Glenmire was dressed on Sunday?

MARTHA. Well, ma'am, is it the little lady with Mrs. Jamieson you mean? I thought you would like more to know how young Mrs. Smith, the butcher's wife, was dressed, her being a bride.

MISS POLE. Good gracious me! as if we cared about a Mrs. Smith.

MARTHA. The little lady in Mrs. Jamieson's pew had on, ma'am, rather an old black silk, and a shepherd's plaid cloak, ma'am; and very bright black eyes she had, ma'am, and a pleasant, sharp face; not over young, ma'am, but yet, I should guess, younger than Mrs. Jamieson herself. She looked up and down the church like a bird, and nipped up her petticoats when she came out, as quick and sharp as ever I

see. I'll tell you what, ma'am, she's more like Mrs. Deacon, at the *Coach and Horses* nor any one.

MISS MATTY. Hush, Martha! that's not respectful.

MARTHA. Isn't it, ma'am? I beg pardon, I'm sure; but Jem Hearn said so as well. He said, she was just such a sharp, stirring sort of a body——

MISS POLE. Lady.

MARTHA. Lady—as Mrs. Deacon.

MISS MATTY. Thank you, Martha; that will do.

(*Exit Martha.*)

MISS POLE. Well, I must go home and write my note, and we might arrange to go together on Tuesday evening. I shall be dressed by five o'clock—the invitation is for six, I know, but in case the *St. James' Chronicle* should come before I start, I should like to have time to see it, and coach myself up in the court news, ready for my evening's interview with the aristocracy. Otherwise, I don't know what we *shall* talk about that is high enough to interest my lady. Of course the rise in the price of sugar would be the natural topic, as preserving time is so near, but I am not sure

if the peerage eat preserves, much less know how they are made.

(*Exit Miss Pole.*)

MARY. Then we do not decline ?

MISS MATTY. No, my dear. Please be so good as to write a little note and say we are most happy to accept.

END OF SCENE.

Morning Calls

III. "ENGAGED!"

CHARACTERS

MISS MATTY

[Dress similar to I. and II., pinned up in front while she dusts. Black silk apron trimmed wide scallops.]

MARY SMITH

[Pink and white muslin gown; white undersleeves and deep soft collar; straw bonnet trimmed pale pink ribbons; white sarcenet pelerine; white gloves.]

MISS POLE

[Sprigged lilac cotton gown; brown silk pelerine cut in dents; straw bonnet trimmed amber ostrich feathers, black blond, and rose-coloured ribbon; small fringed sunshade.]

MORNING CALLS

MRS. FORRESTER

[Grey merino dress, flowered in purple pansies; mauve pelerine with short ends; mauve silk bonnet trimmed white ostrich plume and white ribbons.]

Scene: Miss Matty's parlour. Miss Matty dusting some china, etc.

"Lady Glenmire proved to be a bright little woman of middle age, who had been very pretty in the days of her youth, and who was even yet very pleasant-looking. I saw Miss Pole appraising her dress in the first five minutes, and I take her word when she said the next day—

"'My dear! ten pounds would have purchased every stitch she had on—lace and all.'

"It was pleasant to suspect that a peeress could be poor, and partly reconciled us to the fact that her husband had never sat in the House of Lords; which, when we first heard of it, seemed a kind of swindling us out of our respect on false pretences; a sort of 'A Lord and No Lord' business.

"We were all very silent at first. We were thinking what we could talk about,

that should be high enough to interest My Lady.

". . . At last, Miss Pole, who had always a great deal of courage and *savoir faire*, spoke to Lady Glenmire, who, on her part, had seemed just as much puzzled to know how to break the silence as we were.

"'Has your ladyship been to Court lately?' asked she. . . .

". . . 'I never was there in my life,' said Lady Glenmire, with a broad Scotch accent, but in a very sweet voice.

". . . We found out, in the course of the evening, that Lady Glenmire was going to pay Mrs. Jamieson a long visit. . . . On the whole, we were rather glad to hear this, for she had made a pleasant impression upon us; and it was also very comfortable to find, from things which dropped out in the course of conversation, that, in addition to many other genteel qualities, she was far removed from the 'vulgarity of wealth.'"

"Mrs. Fitz-Adam was the widowed sister of the Cranford surgeon. Their parents were respectable farmers, content with their station. The name of these good people was Hoggins. Mr. Hoggins was the Cran-

ford doctor now ; we disliked the name, and considered it coarse ; but, as Miss Jenkyns said, if he changed it to Piggins it would not be much better. We had hoped to discover a relationship between him and that Marchioness of Exeter whose name was Molly Hoggins ; but the man, careless of his own interests, utterly ignored and denied any such relationship, although, as dear Miss Jenkyns had said, he had a sister called Mary, and the same Christian names were very apt to run in families.

". . . As Miss Matty observed, though Mr. Hoggins did say 'Jack's up,' 'A fig for his heels,' and called preference 'pref,' she believed he was a very worthy man and a very clever surgeon. Indeed, we were rather proud of our doctor at Cranford, as a doctor. We often wished, when we heard of Queen Adelaide or the Duke of Wellington being ill, that they would send for Mr. Hoggins ; but, on consideration, we were rather glad they did not, for, if we were ailing, what should we do if Mr. Hoggins had been appointed physician-in-ordinary to the Royal Family ? As a surgeon we were proud of him ; but as a man—or rather, I should say, as a gentleman—we

could only shake our heads over his name and himself, and wished that he had read Lord Chesterfield's Letters in the days when his manners were susceptible of improvement."

MISS MATTY. I wonder why Mary does not come back. I hope she has not found poor Samuel Brown any worse—the *signor*, I should say. Really, my heart aches for those poor people. And yet they have met with a great deal of kindness. I do not think any one could be under a better doctor than Mr. Hoggins. I do wish Queen Adelaide would send for him when she is ill, and the Duke of Wellington too. Though I do not know what we should do in Cranford without him if any of us were ailing.

(*Enter Mary Smith in out-door dress.*)

MISS MATTY. Well, dear, and how did you find the poor signor?

MARY. Oh, so much better. He has recovered very rapidly lately. (*Taking off her bonnet, etc., as she talks.*) He owes that to Mr. Hoggins. I am rather proud of our doctor at Cranford—as a *doctor*, I mean, but as a man—or rather, a gentleman—— (*They shake their heads.*)

Miss Matty. He is certainly a very worthy man, and a very clever surgeon, though he does say "Jack's up," and "a fig for his heels," and he calls preference "pref." It is a pity he is not more refined.

Mary. Well, perhaps one cannot have everything in a surgeon, and he has wonderful skill.

Miss Matty. Yes, I know. Yet I can't help wishing he had more genteel manners; and that dreadful name, Mr. Hoggins!

(*Knock heard outside.*)

Mary (*horrified*). There's a knock! Three taps! That means a caller!

Miss Matty. A caller's knock! But it's not twelve o'clock yet, and I have got on my old cap.

Mary. And we haven't changed our collars.

(*Mary hastily gathers up her out-door things which she had laid down, and Miss Matty unpins her gown and removes her apron.*)

Miss Pole (*calling outside*). Don't go—I can't wait. (*Enters breathless.*) It's not twelve, I know—but never mind your dress—I must speak to you.

(*Miss Matty and Mary try to look as*

though they had not been disturbed. Miss Pole sits down and lifts up her hands in amazement and brings them down in silence, as if what she had to say was too big for words. Miss Matty and Mary look at her in astonishment and curiosity.)

MISS POLE. What do you think, Miss Matty ? What *do* you think ? Lady Glenmire is to marry—is to be married, I mean—Lady Glenmire—Mr. Hoggins—Mr. Hoggins is going to marry Lady Glenmire.

MISS MATTY and MARY. Marry ! Marry ! Madness !

MISS POLE (*with decision*). Marry ! *I* said marry ! as you do ; and I also said what a fool my lady is going to make of herself ! I could have said 'Madness !' but I controlled myself, for it was in a public shop that I heard of it. Where feminine delicacy is gone to, I don't know ! You and I, Miss Matty, would have been ashamed to have known that our marriage was spoken of in a grocer's shop, in the hearing of shopmen !

MISS MATTY (*sighing as one recovering from a blow*). But perhaps it is not true. Perhaps we are doing her injustice.

MISS POLE. No ; I have taken care to

ascertain that. I went straight to Mrs. Fitz-Adam, to borrow a cookery-book which I knew she had; and I introduced my congratulations *à propos* of the difficulty gentlemen must have in housekeeping; and Mrs. Fitz-Adam bridled up, and said that she believed it was true, though how and where I could have heard it she did not know. She said her brother and Lady Glenmire had come to an understanding at last. "Understanding!" Such a coarse word! But my lady will have to come down to many a want of refinement. I have reason to believe Mr. Hoggins sups on bread and cheese and beer every night.

Miss Matty. Marry! Well! I never thought of it. Two people that we know going to be married! It's coming very near.

Miss Pole. So near that my heart stopped beating, when I heard of it, while you might have counted twelve.

Miss Matty (*with gentle pity*). One does not know whose turn may come next. Here in Cranford poor Lady Glenmire might have thought herself safe.

Miss Pole (*tossing her head*). Bah! Don't you remember poor dear Captain

Brown's song, "Tibbie Fowler," and the line—

> Set her on the Tintock Tap,
> The wind will blaw a man till her?

MISS MATTY. That was because Tibbie Fowler was rich, I think.

MISS POLE. Well, there is a kind of attraction about Lady Glenmire that I, for one, should be ashamed to have.

MARY. But how can she have fancied Mr. Hoggins? I am not surprised that Mr. Hoggins has liked *her*.

MISS MATTY. Oh! I don't know. Mr. Hoggins is rich, and very pleasant-looking, and very good-tempered and kind-hearted.

MISS POLE (*with a little dry laugh*). She has married for an establishment, that's it. I suppose she takes the surgery with it.

MARY. I wonder how Mrs. Jamieson will receive the news.

MISS POLE. Ah! H'm! The person who was left in charge of Mrs. Jamieson's house to keep off followers from her maids, has set up a follower of her own! And that follower a man whom Mrs. Jamieson has always tabooed as vulgar, and inadmissible

to Cranford society, not only on account of his name—Hoggins, but because of his voice, his complexion, and his boots, which smelt of the stable, and himself smelling of drugs.

MISS MATTY. Do you think Mr. Hoggins ever went to see Lady Glenmire at Mrs. Jamieson's ?

MISS POLE. That I cannot say. Chloride of lime would not purify the house in its owner's estimation if he has.

MARY. But they used to meet, as we know, at the poor sick conjurer's.

MISS MATTY. Ah, yes ; whatever we may think of the unsuitableness of the match, we must allow that they have both been exceedingly kind to that poor man.

MISS POLE. Well, Miss Matty, you and I may congratulate ourselves that so far we have escaped marriage.

MISS MATTY (*sighing*). Ah, yes ; we ought indeed to be thankful.

MISS POLE. I notice it always makes people credulous to the last degree. You remember what Lady Glenmire said about the robberies. Instead of believing what I told her about that murderous gang, she actually believed all that vamped-up story

about the theft of a cat! which Mr. Hoggins probably told her himself. Evidently she will swallow anything. Yes, I think it argues great natural credulity in a woman if she cannot keep herself from being married. *I* have always been on my guard against believing too much of what men say.

(*Enter Mrs. Forrester.*)

MRS. FORRESTER. Good morning, Miss Matty.

MISS MATTY (*crossing to her*). Oh! have you heard?

MARY. Yes; have you heard?

MRS. FORRESTER. Heard? No! What?

(*Miss Pole, who has been seized with a violent fit of coughing, looks imploringly over her pocket handkerchief at Miss Matty to prevent her speaking. They are all silent, looking from one to another.*)

MARY (*aside*). We must not deprive poor Miss Pole of the pleasure of telling the news, even if we have to wait for it.

MRS. FORRESTER. What *is* the matter?

MISS MATTY. Such a piece of news! (*Sighing.*) I wonder how you will bear it.

(*Miss Pole again tries to silence Miss Matty by gestures; then begins.*)

MISS POLE. Lady Glenmire—they are going to be married—Mr. Hoggins——

MRS. FORRESTER. Mr. Hoggins going to marry Lady Glenmire ?

(*They all nod.*)

MRS. FORRESTER. Lady Glenmire ! ! Well ! such conduct brings stains on the aristocracy.

MISS MATTY. Of course you are as surprised as we are, and perhaps feel it more:

MRS. FORRESTER. I feel for my Order: It is dreadful.

(*All shake their heads.*)

MARY. When will it take place, I wonder ?

MRS. FORRESTER. And where ?

MISS POLE. Does any one know how much a year Mr. Hoggins has got ?

MRS. FORRESTER. Will Lady Glenmire drop her title ?

MISS MATTY. I hope so, for I do not know how Martha and the other servants in Cranford can ever be brought to announce a married couple as Lady Glenmire and Mr. Hoggins.

MISS POLE. But will they be visited ?

MRS. FORRESTER. Perhaps Mrs. Jamieson may not like us to visit her.

MARY. But Lady Glenmire is very kind and sociable and agreeable.

MRS. FORRESTER. It cannot have been her dress that has won Mr. Hoggins' heart, for she goes about more shabby than ever.

MISS POLE. Ah! that reminds me. I was just on my way to Johnson's, to have a look at the new spring fashions. It is always as well to be prepared. One never knows what may not happen.

MRS. FORRESTER. Then let me accompany you, Miss Pole. I have been thinking my merino was getting a little warm for the end of March.

MISS MATTY. And would you mind letting me know if you see anything new in the way of turbans? (*Following out Miss Pole and Mrs. Forrester repeating "Turbans. Be sure and look at them," etc.*)

MARY. I notice that after the announcement of an engagement, unmarried ladies always flutter out in unusual gaiety and new clothes. Now, Miss Matty and Miss Pole will talk about bonnets and caps and gowns for the next fortnight.

MISS MATTY (*returning*). I don't know how it is, but I really feel quite upset by the news we have heard. Let me see—it is

ten—yes, it is fifteen years since I have heard of any of my acquaintance going to be married. It has given me quite a shock, and makes me feel as if I cannot think what will happen next.

MARY. Well, we must be thankful, as Miss Pole says, that we are not married.

MISS MATTY. But a husband would be a great protection against thieves and burglars, and ghosts. To be sure marriage is a risk, but I remember the time when I had looked forward to being married as much as any one. (*Hastily checking herself.*) Not to any particular person, my dear; only the old story, you know, of ladies always saying, "*When* I marry," and gentlemen, "*If* I marry." It is so long ago, and no one ever knew how much I thought of it at the time. But even if I did meet with any one who wished to marry me now (and, as Miss Pole says, one is never too safe), I could not take him, nor any one but the person I once thought I should be married to; and he is dead and gone, and he never knew how it all came about that I said "No," when I had thought many and many a time—— Well, it's no matter what I thought. I am

very happy, my dear. No one has such kind friends as I.

MARY (*aside*). So she still grieves for Mr. Holbrook.

MISS MATTY. Perhaps, after all, Lady Glenmire's engagement may be a good thing. And Mr. Hoggins is really a very personable man; and as for his manners, why, if they are not very polished, I have known people with very good hearts, and very clever minds too, who were not what some people reckoned refined, but who were both true and tender.

(*Clock strikes.*)

Dear me! that's one o'clock, and we have not been to change our caps yet. (*Patters off.*)

MARY (*following her out*). No; we have all been so very much "Engaged!"

END OF SCENE.

Old Letters

[*The recital of Poor Peter, shortened from the account given in* CRANFORD, *has proved to be one of the most popular of the scenes. It needs, however, a careful study of Miss Matty's character and manner to give full weight to its pathos, and prevent its seeming lengthy.*]

Time of performance : half an hour.

CHARACTERS

MISS MATTY

[Slate-grey merino or silk dress ; soft embroidered muslin collar ; black satin reticule ; cap with lavender ribbons tied under chin ; spectacles.]

MARY SMITH

[White muslin dress with pale blue line in it, open at the neck ; soft deep collar ; wide hanging sleeves and under-sleeves of white muslin ; pale blue ribbon at waist and collar.]

SCENES FROM "CRANFORD"

MARTHA

[Pink spotted cotton dress; muslin cap and apron.]

Scene: Miss Matty's parlour; small table C., chairs on each side; fireplace L.; two vases containing spills on shelf; arm-chair by fire; footstool; another small table R. near entrance. Grate can be arranged with lighted candle behind red paper to throw a glow, and at which Mary can light a spill. When destroying letters Miss Matty can drop them to one side of candle, so that they do not ignite. If the candle is fixed in a flat candlestick it is perfectly safe. Evening. Miss Matty dozing by the fire. Mary Smith sewing at table C.

"Miss Matty Jenkyns was chary of candles. We had many devices to use as few as possible. In the winter afternoons she would sit knitting for two or three hours—she could do this in the dark, or by firelight—and when I asked if I might not ring for candles to finish stitching my wristbands, she told me to keep 'blind man's holiday.' They were usually brought in with tea, but we only burnt one at a time. As we lived

in constant preparation for a friend who might come in any evening (but who never did), it required some contrivance to keep our two candles of the same length, ready to be lighted, and to look as if we burnt two always. The candles took it in turns, and whatever we might be talking about or doing, Miss Matty's eyes were habitually fixed upon the candle, ready to jump up and extinguish it and to light the other before they had become too uneven in length to be restored to equality in the course of the evening.

"One night, I remember this candle economy particularly annoyed me. I had been very much tired of my compulsory 'blind man's holiday,' especially as Miss Matty had fallen asleep, and I did not like to stir the fire and run the risk of awakening her; so I could not even sit on the rug, and scorch myself with sewing by firelight according to my usual custom. I fancied Miss Matty must be dreaming of her early life, for she spoke one or two words in her uneasy sleep, bearing reference to persons who were dead long before. When Martha brought in the lighted candle and tea, Miss Matty started into wakefulness, with a

strange, bewildered look around, as if we were not the people she expected to see about her. . . . Perhaps this reminded her of the desirableness of looking over all the old family letters, and destroying such as ought not to be allowed to fall into the hands of strangers; for she had often spoken of the necessity of this task, but had always shrunk from it with a timid dread of something painful. To-night, however, she rose up and went for them—in the dark; for she piqued herself on the precise neatness of all her chamber arrangements, and used to look uneasily at me when I lighted a bed-candle to go to another room for anything. When she returned there was a faint, pleasant smell of Tonquin beans in the room. I had always noticed this scent about any of the things which had belonged to her mother; and many of the letters were addressed to her—yellow bundles of love letters, sixty or seventy years old. Miss Matty undid the packet with a sigh; but she stifled it directly, as if it were hardly right to regret the flight of time, or of life either. . . . I never knew what sad work the reading of old letters was before that evening. I saw the tears stealing down

the well-worn furrows of Miss Matty's cheeks, and her spectacles often wanted wiping. I trusted at last that she would light the other candle, for my own eyes were rather dim, and I wanted more light to see the pale, faded ink; but no, even through her tears, she saw and remembered her little economical ways."

MARY. It is getting very dark. May I ring for candles? I should like to finish stitching my wristbands.

MISS MATTY. No, my dear; let us keep blind man's holiday. Martha will bring in the candle with the tea. (*Miss Matty dozes again.*)

MARY (*aside*). Perhaps I can finish them by firelight. (*Rises.*) Oh, Miss Matty has fallen asleep. I had better not stir the fire and run the risk of awakening her. Well, I suppose I must be content to be idle, but I hope Martha will not be long in bringing the tea, for I am getting very tired of my compulsory blind man's holiday.

I have often noticed that almost every one has his own individual, small economies. Now how chary dear Miss Matty is of candles! I am not above owning that I

have this human weakness myself. Not about *candles*; I don't think I should want to economize there! No; *string* is *my* foible. My pockets get full of little hanks of it, that I pick up and twist together, ready for uses that never come. I am seriously annoyed if any one cuts the string of a parcel instead of patiently undoing it (*taking a twist of string out of her reticule*). But I think at this moment I would sacrifice that for a candle. (*Miss Matty murmurs in her sleep.*) Poor Miss Matty! I wonder if she is dreaming of her early life.

(*Enter Martha with tea-tray and two candles, one of which is lighted.*)

Miss Matty (*starting into wakefulness*). Dear, dear! Here is the tea-tray already. I have been thinking so much, my dear, of days gone by that I hardly noticed how the time went. (*Sighs.*) Such a long time ago. And it reminds me that I really ought to look over some of the old family letters, and destroy such as ought not to be allowed to fall into the hands of strangers. It is a painful task, but I think that to-night would be a good opportunity for getting it over. (*Rises.*) My dear, would you pour out the tea, and I will fetch them.

MARY. Let me light you a candle.

MISS MATTY. Oh no, my dear, thank you. I know just exactly where everything is in my room, and can manage *quite* well in the dark.

(*Exit Miss Matty.*)

MARY. How sad her face is this evening.

(*Re-enter Martha with a plate of cake.*)

How long has your mistress been so poorly, Martha?

MARTHA. Well, I think it's better than a fortnight; it is, I know. It was one Tuesday, after Miss Pole had been, that she went into this moping way. I thought she was tired, and it would go off with a night's rest, but no, she has gone on and on ever since, till I thought it my duty to write to you, ma'am.

MARY. You did quite right, Martha. It is a comfort to think she has so faithful a servant about her. And I hope you find your place comfortable?

MARTHA. Well, ma'am, missus is very kind, and there's plenty to eat and drink, and not more work but what I can do easily; but——

MARY. But what, Martha?

MARTHA. Why, it seems so hard of

missus not to let me have any followers. There's such lots of young fellows in the town, and many a one has as much as offered to keep company with me; and I may never be in such a likely place again, and it's like wasting an opportunity. Many a girl as I know would have 'em unbeknownst to missus; but I've given missus my word, and I'll stick to it; or else this is just the house for missus never to be the wiser if they *did* come; and it's such a capable kitchen—there's such good dark corners in it—I'd be bound to hide any one. I counted up last Sunday night—for I'll not deny I was crying because I had to shut the door in Jem Hearn's face, and he's a steady young man, fit for any girl; only I had given missus my word. (*Begins to cry.*)

MARY. Well, don't cry, Martha, there's a good girl. You know that both Miss Matilda and the late Miss Jenkyns always *did* dislike their servants having followers; but I will see if something can be said. You go downstairs again, for Miss Matilda will be back directly, and she would be so vexed to see you cry.

(*Exit Martha, crying.*)

MARY (*pouring out the tea*). So it's about a fortnight since Miss Matty has been so poorly. I wonder if she is grieving over Mr. Holbrook's illness; for only this morning when I met Miss Pole, she told me he had been taken ill a fortnight ago, and had not long to live. I have often thought of a secret Miss Pole once told me about an old love affair of poor Miss Matty's, and that Mr. Thomas Holbrook. I wonder if she has always regretted having refused him, and what made her do it. Miss Pole thinks it was because her father, the rector, and Miss Jenkyns thought he was beneath her in rank, and gentle Miss Matty always gave in to Miss Deborah in everything. Poor dear creature! It's my belief she is grieving over him now. Ah, here she comes with the letters. What a curious smell! Oh, I know what it is—Tonquin beans!

(*Enter Miss Matty with packets of letters, which she puts on the table.*)

MISS MATTY. Now, my dear, you will help me, I'm sure. (*They sit at opposite sides of table.*) We will look them over separately. We can each take a letter out of the same bundle, and tell each other what it is about before destroying it.

MARY. Here are two bundles tied together, and ticketed in Miss Jenkyns' handwriting. How faded and pale the ink is. I wonder if I can see to read it. (*Reads*): "Letters interchanged between my ever-honoured father and my dearly-beloved mother, prior to their marriage in July, 1774." I suppose the rector of Cranford was about twenty-seven years of age when he wrote these letters?

MISS MATTY. Yes; and my mother was just eighteen at the time. We must burn them, I think. No one will care for them when I am gone. (*Miss Matty crosses to the fire and drops the letters in one by one. She takes off her spectacles and wipes them. Mary continues to read.*)

MARY (*reading*). "Letter of pious congratulation and exhortation from my venerable grandfather to my beloved mother, on occasion of my own birth. Also some practical remarks on the desirability of keeping warm the extremities of infants from my excellent grandmother." . . . "Be sure you wrap your baby's feet up in flannel, and keep it warm by the fire, although it is summer, for babies are so tender."

"Hebrew verses sent me by my honoured

husband. I thowt to have had a letter about killing the pig, but must wait. Mem., to send the poetry to Sir Peter Arley, as my husband desires."

These must be packets of Miss Jenkyns' letters (*taking up other packets*).

Miss Matty (*having returned to the table*). Ah, those I do not like to burn. All the others are only interesting to those who have loved the writers, and it would hurt me if they should fall into the hands of strangers. But Deborah's letters are so very superior. Any one might profit by reading them. Give them to me, my dear. They must be carefully gone through, every one of them—even if we have to put them by for another evening. I think I must have the second candle lighted to see them better, for Deborah had a way of crossing her letters, and that puzzles me sometimes. (*Mary lights the second candle.*) These are dated 1805. Oh, I know when that was. Deborah was staying with some friends near Newcastle, and every day they were expecting an invasion from Buonaparte (Bony they used to call him), and they lived with their clothes packed up, ready for a flight to Alston Moor. Oh, it was a

dreadful time! I know *I* used to wake up in the night many a time, and think I heard the tramp of the French entering Cranford. Many people talked of hiding themselves in the salt mines, and meat would have kept capitally down there, only perhaps we should have been thirsty. I think we will put them by for another evening. So I can put out the second candle again. Let me see—*this* one should burn a bit now, to get them even lengths. We must not look as if we always burnt only one candle, supposing any one should drop in. (*Blows out one candle.*)

MARY (*taking up another packet*). What are these, Miss Matty? (*Reads.*) "From poor Peter." (*Aside.*) Oh, that must be the brother she once told me about, who went away from home years and years ago, and has never been heard of since. (*Reading.*) "Mother dear, do send me a cake, and put plenty of citron in." (*Hands letter to Miss Matty.*)

MISS MATTY. Poor Peter! His mother's darling. The best good fellow that ever was. But he was too fond of practical joking, and my father was disappointed in him. At last he fetched him away from

school and said he would read with him himself. My poor mother! I remember how she used to stand in the hall, just near enough to the study door to catch the tone of my father's voice. I could tell in a moment if all was going right, by her face.

MARY. What went wrong at last? That tiresome Latin, I dare say.

MISS MATTY. No, it was not the Latin. Peter was in high favour with my father, for he worked up well for him. But he seemed to think the Cranford people might be joked about, and made fun of, and they did not like it; nobody does. He was always hoaxing them. "Hoaxing" is not a pretty word, my dear, and I hope you won't tell your father I used it, for I should not like him to think I was not choice in my language, after living with such a woman as Deborah. And be sure you never use it yourself. I don't know how it slipped out of my mouth, except it was that I was thinking of poor Peter, and it was always his expression. But he was a very gentlemanly boy in most things. Still, he did like joking and making fun; and he seemed to think the old ladies in Cranford would believe anything: There were a good many

old ladies living here then. We are principally ladies now, I know, but still we are not so *old* as the ladies used to be when I was a girl. I could laugh to think of some of Peter's jokes. No, my dear, I won't tell you of them, because they might not shock you as they ought to do, and they were very shocking. He even took in my father once, by dressing himself up as a lady that was passing through Cranford and wished to see the rector.

MARY. Did Miss Jenkyns know of these tricks ?

MISS MATTY. Oh, no ! Deborah would have been much too shocked. No one knew but me. I wish I had always known of Peter's plans, but sometimes he did not tell me. He used to say the old ladies wanted something to talk about ; but I don't think they did. They had the *St. James' Chronicle* three times a week, just as we have now, and we have plenty to say. At last there was a terrible sad thing happened. But wait one moment, my dear, before I tell you what it was. I should not like there to be any chance of Martha hearing what I am going to tell you. (*Goes to door and looks out.*) Oh, there is no one

there. Perhaps I had better ring. (*Rings bell. Enter Martha.*) Martha, I wish you to go to the farm at the other end of the town, and get the eggs this evening.

MARTHA. Yes, ma'am.

MISS MATTY (*looking anxiously at Martha*). Why, Martha, you have not been crying, have you ?

(*Martha looks as if she were going to begin again, but says nothing.*)

MISS MATTY (*aside*). God forbid that I should grieve any young hearts. (*Aloud.*) Martha, you are young—— (*She pauses nervously.*)

MARTHA (*dropping a curtsey*). Yes, please, ma'am ; two and twenty last third of October, please, ma'am.

MISS MATTY. And perhaps, Martha, you may some time meet with a young man you like, and who likes you. I did say you were not to have any followers, but if you meet with such a young man, and tell me, and I find he is respectable, I have no objection to his coming to see you once a week.

MARTHA (*eagerly*). Please, ma'am, there's Jem Hearn, and he's a joiner making three and sixpence a day, and six foot one in his stocking feet, please, ma'am ; and if you'll

ask about him to-morrow morning, every one will give him a character for steadiness, and he'll be glad enough to come to-morrow, I'll be bound.

MISS MATTY (*rather startled*). Well, you can go for the eggs now, Martha, and I will lock the door after you. You are not afraid to go, are you?

MARTHA. No, ma'am; not at all. Jem Hearn will be only too proud to go with me.

(*Exit Martha.*)

MISS MATTY. I wish that Martha had more maidenly reserve.

MARY. She is a good, honest creature, however, and you have made her very happy this evening. And now I am so longing to hear the story about your brother Peter that you were going to tell me.

MISS MATTY. We will put out the candle, my dear. We can talk just as well by firelight, you know. (*Mary puts out candle.*) Well, you see, Deborah had gone from home for a fortnight or so. It was a very still, quiet day, I remember, overhead, and the lilacs were all in flower, so I suppose it was spring. My father had gone out to see some sick people in the

parish. I recollect seeing him leave the house, with his wig and shovel-hat and cane. What possessed our poor Peter I don't know ; but it seems he went up to Deborah's room, and dressed himself up in an old gown and shawl and bonnet. And then he got a pillow, and made it into a little—you are sure we locked the door, my dear, for I should not like any one to hear—into—into—a little baby, with white long clothes ; and he went and walked up and down in the Filbert Walk—just half hidden by the rails and half seen ; and he talked to his pillow, just as you might to a baby, all the nonsense people do. Oh dear ! and my father came stepping stately up the street, as he always did, and what should he see but a little black crowd of people—I dare say as many as twenty—all peeping through his garden rails. So he thought, at first, they were only looking at a new rhododendron that was in full bloom, and that he was very proud of. But presently—and oh, my dear, I tremble to think of it—he looked through the rails himself, and he saw—I don't know what he thought he saw, but old Clare told me his face went quite grey-white with anger, and his eyes

blazed out under his frowning black brows; and he spoke out—oh, so terribly! and bade the people all stop where they were, not one of them to go, not one to stir a step; and swift as light he was in at the garden door, and down the Filbert Walk, and he seized hold of poor Peter and tore his clothes off his back—bonnet, shawl, gown and all—and he threw the pillow among the people over the railings; and then he was very, very angry indeed, and before all the people he lifted up his cane and flogged Peter.

My dear, that boy's trick on that sunny day broke my mother's heart, and changed my father for life; it did indeed. Old Clare said Peter looked as white as my father, and stood as still as a statue to be flogged, and my father struck hard. When my father stopped to take breath, Peter said, "Have you done enough, sir?" I don't know what my father said, but old Clare said, Peter turned to where the people outside the railing were, and made them a low bow, as grand and as grave as any gentleman, and then walked slowly into the house.

I was in the store room, helping my mother to make cowslip wine. I cannot

abide the wine now, nor the scent of the flowers; they turn me sick and faint, as they did that day when Peter came in, looking as haughty as any man. "Mother," he said, "I am come to say, 'God bless you' for ever." I saw his lip quiver as he spoke. My mother looked at him rather frightened and wondering, and asked what was to do. He did not smile or speak, but put his arms round her, and kissed her as if he did not know how to leave off; and before she could speak again he was gone. We talked it over, and could not understand it, and my mother bade me go and seek my father and ask what it was all about. I found him walking up and down, looking highly displeased. "Tell your mother I have flogged Peter, and that he richly deserved it." I durst not ask any more questions. When I told my mother, she sat down, quite faint, for a minute. I remember, a few days after, seeing the poor withered cowslip flowers thrown out to the leaf heap to decay and die there. There was no making of cowslip wine that year at the rectory—nor, indeed, ever after. Presently my mother went up to Peter's room to talk the matter over with him. But no Peter was there!

We looked over the house; no Peter was there! Even my father, who had not liked to join in the search at first, helped us ere long. The rectory was a very old house—steps up into a room, steps down into a room, all through. At first my mother went calling low and soft, as if to reassure the poor boy, "Peter, Peter dear! it's only me." But by-and-by, as the servants came back from the errands we sent them in various directions, to find where Peter was—as we found he was not in the garden, nor in the hayloft, nor anywhere about—my mother's cry grew louder and wilder, "Peter, Peter, my darling! Where are you?" for then she felt and understood that that long kiss meant some sad kind of good-bye. My father sat with his head in his hands, not speaking, and my mother kept passing from room to room, in and out of the house, looking in places she had looked into over and over again. At last (and it was nearly dark) my father rose up. He took hold of my mother's arm as she came through the door, and looked into her poor face all wild and white. "Molly!" said he, "I did not think all this would happen," and then—strong man as he was

—his tears began to flow. But my mother took his great hand in her little soft one, and then, hand in hand, they went together on that unceasing, weary walk from room to room, through house and garden.

Oh, how I wished for Deborah! I wrote for her to come home. And I sent a message to Mr. Holbrook's house—poor Mr. Holbrook!—you know who I mean. I don't mean I sent a message to him, but I sent some one I could trust to know if Peter was at his house. For at one time Mr. Holbrook was an occasional visitor at the rectory—you know he was Miss Pole's cousin—and he had been very kind to Peter—he was very kind to everybody, and I thought Peter might have gone off there. But Peter had never been seen. It was night now, but still my father and mother walked on and on.

Then old Clare asked to speak to me. "I have borrowed the nets from the weir, Miss Matty. Shall we drag the ponds to-night, or wait for the morning?" I remember staring in his face to gather his meaning, and when I did I laughed outright. The horror of that new thought—our bright, darling Peter, cold and stark

and dead! I remember the ring of my own laugh now. But my screams roused my sweet, dear mother, and collected her poor, wandering wits; but her soft eyes were never the same again; they had always a restless, craving look, as if seeking for what they could not find. Oh, it was an awful time! coming down like a thunderbolt on the still, sunny day, when the lilacs were all in bloom.

MARY. Where was Mr. Peter?

MISS MATTY. He had made his way to Liverpool; and there was war then, and some of the king's ships lay off the mouth of the Mersey, and they were only too glad to have a fine, likely boy such as him (five foot nine he was) come to offer himself. The captain wrote to my father, and Peter wrote to my mother. Stay! those letters will be somewhere here. Light the candle again, if you please, my dear.

(*Mary lights both candles.*)

Ah, here they are. Read this one, my mother's letter to Peter, begging him to come back. My eyes are not so young as they were.

(*Miss Matty discovers that both candles are burning, and hastily blows out one.*)

MARY (*reads*). "My dearest Peter,—

You did not think we should be so sorry as we are, I know, or you would never have gone away. Your father sits and sighs till my heart aches to hear him, and yet he only did what he thought was right. Perhaps he has been too severe, but God knows how we love you, my dear, only boy. Come back and make us happy. I *know* you will come back."

MISS MATTY. But he did not come back. That spring day was the last time he ever saw his mother's face.

MARY. But this letter from the captain summons your father and mother to Liverpool to see their boy.

MISS MATTY. Yes ; but that letter got delayed somehow ; and it was race-time, and all the post horses in Cranford were gone to the races. My father and mother set off in their own gig—and oh, my dear, they were too late—the ship was gone ! And now read Peter's letter to my mother.

MARY (*reads*). "Mother, do come and see me before I leave the Mersey. Mother, we may go into battle. I hope we shall, and lick those French ; but I must see you again before that time. So do come, mother dear."

MISS MATTY. And she was too late, too late!

MARY. How did your mother bear it?

MISS MATTY. Oh, she was patience itself. She had never been strong, and this weakened her terribly. My father used to sit and look at her. He seemed as if he could look at nothing else when she was by. But you see, he saw what we did not, that it was killing my mother. Yes, killing her. (Put out the candle, my dear; I can talk better in the dark.) She was always cheerful when he was by, and would speak of how she thought Peter stood a good chance of being admiral very soon, and how she thought of seeing him in his navy uniform, and what sort of hats admirals wore, just to make my father think she was quite glad of what came of that unlucky morning's work. But, oh, my dear, the bitter, bitter crying she had when she was alone; and at last as she grew weaker she could not keep her tears in when Deborah or me was by. And she did not live quite a twelvemonth after Peter went away. And, only think, love! the very day after her death — the very day after — came a parcel for her from India—from her poor boy. It was

a large white India shawl, with just a little narrow border all round; just what my mother would have liked.

MARY. Did Mr. Peter ever come home?

MISS MATTY. Yes, once. He came home a lieutenant; he did not get to be admiral. And he and my father were such friends! My father took him into every house in the parish, he was so proud of him. He never walked out without Peter's arm to lean upon.

MARY (*after a short pause*). And then?

(*Miss Matty has fallen into a reverie and does not hear. Mary crosses and sits on a low stool beside her, and repeats*—)

And then?

MISS MATTY. Then?—Oh, then Peter went to sea again; and by-and-by my father died; and of course our circumstances were changed; and instead of living at the rectory, and keeping three maids and a man, we had to come to this small house, and be content with a servant-of-all-work. But, as Deborah used to say, we have always lived genteelly, even if circumstances have compelled us to simplicity. Poor Deborah!

MARY. And Mr. Peter?

MISS MATTY. Oh, there was some great war in India—I forget what they call it—

and we have never heard of Peter since then. I believe he is dead myself, and it fidgets me that we have never put on mourning for him. And then again, when I sit by myself, and all the house is still, I think I hear his step coming up the street, and my heart begins to flutter and beat. But the sound always goes past—and Peter never comes.

(*Knock heard outside.*)

That's Martha back. No, I'll go, my dear; I can always find my way in the dark, you know. And a blow of fresh air at the door will do my head good, it's got rather a trick of aching. (*Exit.*)

MARY. Poor, dear Miss Matty! What a long, sad story. I wonder if Mr. Peter ever will come back now. I *must* light the candles, and make the room look a little more cheerful. (*Lights both candles.*)

(*Enter Miss Matty, looking perplexed.*)

MARY. Was it Martha?

MISS MATTY. Yes. And I am rather uncomfortable, for I heard such a strange noise, just as I was opening the door.

MARY. Where?

MISS MATTY. In the street—just outside—it sounded like——

MARY. Talking ?

MISS MATTY. No ! kissing !

(*Mary turns away laughing. Miss Matty, discovering that two candles are burning, hurriedly blows out one as the curtain drops.*)

END OF SCENE.

Friends in Need

[*This and the following scene make a pleasing ending to* Old Letters. *They may also be played separately.*]

Time of performance : fifteen minutes.

CHARACTERS

Miss Matty

[Slate-grey merino dress ; black silk apron, trimmed lace ; pleated muslin chemisette ; cap with yellow ribbons ; embroidered reticule ; spectacles.]

Mary Smith

[Flowered morning cotton dress ; full sleeves to wrist ; coloured ribbon and brooch at throat.]

Martha

[Lilac print dress ; sleeves to elbow ; large cooking apron ; cap with narrow blue streamers. Hair full over ears.]

FRIENDS IN NEED

JEM HEARN

[Drab trousers and leggings; red spotted waistcoat; short dark coat; large neckcloth; hair brushed forward.]

Scene: Miss Matty's parlour. Entrance R.; small table R. C.; armchair C.; writing-table, with large desk upon it, back L.; Miss Matty seated thereat, making up accounts; Mary sewing at table R.

"The very Tuesday morning on which Mr. Johnson was going to show the fashions, the post-woman brought two letters to the house. . . . Mine was from my father. Miss Matty's was printed. My father's was just a man's letter; I mean it was very dull, and gave no information beyond that he was well, that they had had a good deal of rain, that trade was very stagnant, and there were many disagreeable rumours afloat. He then asked me if I knew whether Miss Matty still retained her shares in the Town and County Bank, as there were very unpleasant reports about it, though nothing more than he had always foreseen, and had prophesied to Miss Jenkyns years ago,

when she would invest their little property in it—the only unwise step that clever woman had ever taken.

"'Who is your letter from, my dear? Mine is a very civil invitation, signed "Edwin Wilson," asking me to attend an important meeting of the shareholders of the Town and County Bank, to be held in Drumble, on Thursday, the twenty-first. I am sure it is very attentive of them to remember me.'

"I did not like to hear of this 'important meeting,' for though I did not know much about business, I feared it confirmed what my father said; however, I thought, ill news always came fast enough, so I resolved to say nothing about my alarm.

". . . The next morning news came, both official and otherwise, that the Town and County Bank had stopped payment. Miss Matty was ruined.

"She tried to speak quietly to me, but when she came to the actual fact that she would have but about five shillings a week to live upon, she could not restrain a few tears.

". . . Miss Matty smiled at me through her tears, and she would fain have had me see only the smile, not the tears.

"It was an example to me to see how immediately Miss Matty set about the retrenchment which she knew to be right under her altered circumstances. . . . Her idea was to take a single room, and retain as much of her furniture as would be necessary to fit up this, and sell the rest, and there to quietly exist upon what would remain after paying the rent. For my part, I was more ambitious and less contented. I thought of all the things by which a woman past middle age, and with the education common to ladies fifty years ago, could earn or add to a living without materially losing caste; but at length I put even this last clause on one side, and wondered what in the world Miss Matty could do."

Miss Matty (*adding up a column and getting muddled*). I never could do sums in my head. You know, love, I am not like Deborah. If Deborah had lived, I've no doubt she would have seen after the Town and County Bank before they had got themselves into this state.

Mary (*aside*). Ah, why did she invest all their little property in that unlucky bank!

MISS MATTY (*coming forward*). My dear, now that the bank has failed, I shall lose one hundred and forty-nine pounds, thirteen shillings and fourpence a year. I shall only have thirteen pounds a year left. But many a poor person has less, and I am not very extravagant, and when the neck of mutton, and Martha's wages, and the rent are paid, I have not a farthing owing. Of course Martha must go. I must go and tell her. Poor Martha! I think she'll be sorry to leave me. Oh, I am so glad Deborah is spared this. She could not have borne to come down in the world—she had such a noble, lofty spirit. (*Exit.*)

MARY. But not more noble than yours, my dear old friend. (*Rises.*) Oh, it is dreadful! To think that she is ruined! Poor, poor Miss Matty! And I cannot think of any possible way in which she could earn a living. If only she could teach children, what a happy thing that would be. But as to *reading*—well, she always coughs whenever she comes to a long word. And then, *writing*. She can write well, but oh! her spelling! I'm afraid her accomplishments are few. Drawing? She can trace out a scallop pattern for muslin embroidery

if she holds a piece of silver paper over it against the window pane. That is her nearest approach to drawing. What she *does* pique herself upon is making candle-lighters of coloured paper. But would any one pay to have their children taught that? No! there is nothing poor Miss Matty can teach the rising generation of Cranford—unless they can learn to be imitators of her patience, and humility, and quiet contentment.

(*Enter Martha, her face swollen with crying. She bursts out afresh.*)

MARTHA. Is it true, miss, all that Miss Matty has been saying? She's been in the kitchen, and says she's lost all her money, and she's got to give up her little 'ome—and I'm to go.

MARY. Yes, Martha. I grieve to say it is true.

MARTHA. I'll never leave her! No, I won't. I telled her so, and said I could not think how she could find in her heart to give me warning. I could not have had the face to do it, if I'd been her. I might ha' been just as good for nothing as Mrs. Fitz-Adams' Rosy, who struck for higher wages after living seven years and a half

in one place. I said I was not one to go and serve Mammon at that rate; that I knew when I'd got a good missus, if she didn't know when she'd got a good servant ——(*wiping her eyes*).

MARY (*interrupting*). But Martha——

MARTHA. Don't "but Martha" me.

MARY. Listen to reason——

MARTHA (*no longer sobbing*). I'll not listen to reason. Reason always means what some one else has got to say. Now I think what I've got to say is good enough reason; but reason or not, I'll say it, and I'll stick to it. I've money in the Savings Bank, and I've a good stock of clothes, and I'm not going to leave Miss Matty. No, not if she gives me warning every hour in the day (*putting her arms akimbo, and looking defiant*).

MARY (*hesitating*). Well——

MARTHA. I'm thankful you begin with "well!" If you'd ha' begun with "but," as you did afore, I'd not ha' listened to you. Now you may go on.

MARY. I know you would be a great loss to Miss Matty, Martha——

MARTHA (*breaking in triumphantly*). I telled her so. A loss she'd never cease to be sorry for.

MARY. Still, she will have so little—so very little—to live upon, that I don't see just now how she could find you food—she will even be pressed for her own. I tell you this, Martha, because I feel you are like a friend to dear Miss Matty, but you know she might not like to have it spoken about.

(*Martha sits down on the nearest chair and puts her apron over her head, crying loudly. Then looks earnestly at Mary.*)

MARTHA. Was that the reason Miss Matty wouldn't order a pudding to-day? She said she had no great fancy for sweet things, and you and she would just have a mutton chop. But I'll be up to her. (*Rising.*) Never you tell, but I'll make her a pudding, and a pudding she'll like, too, and I'll pay for it myself; so mind you see she eats it. Many a one has been comforted in their sorrow by seeing a good dish come upon the table. (*Exit.*)

MARY. I've got an idea! The sight of Martha must have put it into my head. Miss Matty might sell tea! Why should she not be an agent to the East India Tea Company? Oh, happy thought!

(*Enter Miss Matty.*)

MARY (*running to her*). Miss Matty! I have thought of something you might do to earn money.

MISS MATTY. Well, dear, and what is it? You know I mean to take just a single room, and I shall manage somehow, you may be sure. I must leave this house, of course, and sell the furniture, except just what is necessary for my one room; and then, after I have paid the rent, I must do the best I can.

MARY. Oh, but dear Miss Matty, just listen to my plan. Don't you think you might sell something?

MISS MATTY. Yes, dear; the furniture must be sold, as I have just said.

MARY. Oh, I don't mean that. I mean you might go on selling something. Keep a little——

MISS MATTY (*in horror*). A shop! No; I do not think I could bring myself to that. What would poor Deborah have said!

MARY. But tea, Miss Matty. Could you not be an agent to the East India Tea Company, and sell tea? You need not have a shop for that; at least, you would not require a shop window. I suppose you would have to have a licence, but still I

dare say we could put that up where no one would see it. And tea is not a heavy thing; it would not tax your strength at all.

Miss Matty (*thoughtfully*). No; it isn't heavy—and it isn't greasy—nor sticky. I never could endure anything greasy or sticky. It's a very clean thing. I do not at all mind measuring out tea; but to sell it! I wonder if I could. (*Noise heard outside*). My dear, who do you suppose would come to buy it?

Mary (*listening to the noise, and answering absently*). Oh, everybody. (*Aside.*) What can that noise be?

(*The door bursts open. Enter Martha dragging Jem Hearn, who is overcome with shyness, and stands sleeking down his hair.*)

Martha (*out of breath*). Please, ma'am, he's only Jem Hearn; and please, ma'am, we want to take a lodger—just one quiet lodger, to make our two ends meet; and we'd take any house conformable; and, oh, dear Miss Matty, if I may be so bold, would you have any objections to lodging with us? Jem wants it as much as I do. (*To Jem.*) You great oaf! Why can't you

back me? But he does want it all the same, very bad—don't you, Jem?—only, you see, he's dazed at being called on to speak before quality.

JEM. It's not that; it's that you've taken me all on a sudden, and I didn't think for to get married so soon—and such quick work does flabbergast a man. (*To Miss Matty.*) It's not that I'm against it, ma'am, only Martha has such quick ways with her when once she takes a thing into her head; and marriage, ma'am—marriage nails a man, as one may say. I dare say I shan't mind it after it's once over.

(*Martha has been trying to interrupt him all through his speaking, by plucking his sleeve and nudging him with her elbow.*)

MARTHA. Please, ma'am, don't mind him; he'll come to; 'twas only last night he was an-axing me, and an-axing me, and all the more because I said I could not think of it for years to come, and now he's only taken aback with the suddenness of the joy; but you know, Jem, you are just as full as me about wanting a lodger (*giving him another great nudge*).

JEM. Ay! if Miss Matty would lodge with us — otherwise I've no mind to

be cumbered with strange folk in the house.

Miss Matty (*bewildered*). Marriage is a very solemn thing, Martha.

Jem. It is indeed, ma'am. Not that I've no objections to Martha.

Martha (*angrily, and almost ready to cry with vexation*). You've never let me a-be for asking me for to fix when I would be married, and now you're shaming me before my missus and all.

Jem (*vainly trying to get hold of her hand*). Nay, now! Martha, don't ee! don't ee! Only a man likes to have breathing-time. (*To Miss Matty.*) I hope, ma'am, you know that I am bound to respect every one who has been kind to Martha. I always looked on her as to be my wife—some time; and she has often and often spoken of you as the kindest lady that ever was; and though the plain truth is, I would not like to be troubled with lodgers of the common run, yet if, ma'am, you'd honour us by living with us, I'm sure Martha would do her best to make you comfortable; and I'd keep out of your way as much as I could, which I reckon would be the best kindness such an awkward chap as me could do.

(*Miss Matty has been very busy with taking off her spectacles, wiping them, and replacing them.*)

MISS MATTY. Don't let any thought of me hurry you into marriage; pray don't! Marriage is such a very solemn thing.

MARY. But Miss Matilda will think of your plan, Martha. And I'm sure neither she nor I can ever forget your kindness; nor yours either, Jem.

JEM. Why, yes, ma'am! I'm sure I mean kindly, though I'm a bit fluttered by being pushed straight ahead into matrimony, as it were, and mayn't express myself conformable. But I'm sure I'm willing enough, and give me time to get accustomed; so, Martha, wench, what's the use of crying so, and slapping me if I come near?

(*Martha bounces out of the room followed by Jem, who tries to soothe her.*)

MARY (*laughing*). Oh, poor Jem Hearn! You've a task before you if you want to soothe Martha! But what a kind, good heart she has. To think they should have been planning all this! And so they will get married, and you'll live with them—and —don't look so sad, Miss Matty. (*Kneels beside her.*)

Miss Matty. My dear, the thought of Martha being married so soon gives me quite a shock. I shall never forgive myself if I think I am hurrying the poor creature.

Mary. I think my pity is more for Jem of the two.

Miss Matty. Well, well; I know you all wish to do the best you can for me; only I do hope that no one will be hurried into marriage on my account. I am willing to do anything myself that is right and honest. I only hope that I shall be able to pay every farthing that I can be said to owe, for my father's sake. He was so respected in Cranford. Let me get my writing-desk from the dining-parlour. I should like to make some plans on paper about it all; it is more than I can keep in my head.

(*She rises and goes towards the door; then turns*).

Remember, love, I'm the only one left—I mean there's no one to be hurt by what I do. Only let me see what I *can* do, and pay the poor people as far as I am able. (*Exit.*)

End of Scene.

A Happy Return

Time of performance: ten minutes.

CHARACTERS

Miss Matty

[Same dress as in previous scene. Knitting.]

Mary Smith

[Morning cotton dress, as before.]

Mr. Peter Jenkyns

[Light trousers and leggings buttoning to above knee; flowered drab waistcoat; blue swallowtail coat; high stock; light beaver hat; double eyeglass; plentiful snow-white hair; sun-tanned wrinkled face.]

Two Children

Scene: Miss Matty's dining-parlour converted into a shop. Entrance R. Table

used as counter L. Green tea canisters, comfits in tumblers, and a pair of scales on table. Bunch of flowers and basket of eggs on small side table. On the floor in front of the counter is "a brilliant piece of oil-cloth." Two large boxes of tea stand near. Miss Matty sits behind counter knitting a garter, and singing in a low voice to herself. Two stiff chairs C. back

"The small dining-parlour was converted into a shop, without any of its degrading characteristics; a table was to be the counter; one window was retained unaltered, and the other changed into a glass door. . . . I had expended my own small store in buying all manner of comfits and lozenges, in order to tempt the little people whom Miss Matty loved so much to come about her. Tea in bright green canisters, and comfits in tumblers—Miss Matty and I felt quite proud as we looked round us on the evening before the shop was to be opened. Martha had scoured the boarded floor to a white cleanness, and it was adorned with a brilliant piece of oil-cloth, on which customers were to stand before the table-counter. . . . A very small 'Ma-

tilda Jenkyns, licensed to sell tea,' was hidden under the lintel of the new door, and two boxes of tea, with cabalistic inscriptions all over them, stood ready to disgorge their contents into the canisters.

". . . I attended on Miss Matty. . . . I cast up her accounts, and examined into the state of her canisters and tumblers. I helped her, too, occasionally, in the shop; and it gave me no small amusement, and sometimes a little uneasiness, to watch her ways there. If a little child came in to ask for an ounce of almond comfits (and four of the large kind which Miss Matty sold weighed that much), she always added one more by 'way of make-weight,' as she called it, although the scale was handsomely turned before; and when I remonstrated against this, her reply was, 'The little things like it so much!' There was no use in telling her that the fifth comfit weighed a quarter of an ounce, and made every sale into a loss to her pocket. So . . . I told her how unwholesome almond comfits were, and how ill excess in them might make the little children. This argument produced some effect; for, henceforward, instead of the fifth comfit, she always told them to hold out their

tiny palms, into which she shook either peppermint or ginger lozenges, as a preventive to the dangers that might arise out of the previous sale.

". . . If she gave them good weight, they, in their turn, brought many a little country present to the 'old rector's daughter'; a cream cheese, a few new laid eggs, a little fresh ripe fruit, a bunch of flowers. The counter was quite loaded with these offerings sometimes.

". . . One afternoon, as I was sitting in the shop-parlour with Miss Matty, we saw a gentleman go slowly past the window, and then stand opposite to the door, as if looking out for the name which we had so carefully hidden. He took out a double eyeglass, and peered about for some time before he could discover it. Then he came in. And, all on a sudden, it flashed across me that it was the Aga himself! For his clothes had an out-of-the-way foreign cut about them, and his face was deep brown, as if tanned and re-tanned by the sun. His complexion contrasted oddly with his plentiful snow-white hair; his eyes were dark and piercing, and he had an odd way of contracting them and puckering up his cheeks into innumerable

wrinkles when he looked earnestly at objects. He did so to Miss Matty when he first came in. . . . She was a little fluttered and nervous, but no more so than she always was when any man came into her shop."

(*Enter Mary Smith.*)

MARY. How is custom going this morning, Miss Matty? (*Looks into tea canister.*) Oh, this is nearly empty! You must have done a good trade lately.

MISS MATTY. Yes, dear; it goes on very nicely. There have been quite a number of people in this morning. Really, now that I am accustomed to it, I do not dislike it. I enjoy the little chats I have with many of the people. And look, dear, how kind they are! I have had several country presents again this morning from some of the poor people.

MARY (*taking up the flowers and smelling them*). How very nice! And this (*taking up the basket*)—eggs! (*reading label*) "To the old rector's daughter." Ah, Miss Matty, you make real friends among them. (*Takes the canister and re-fills it from the large tea box*). Do you remember when we first opened shop a year ago? What a business

we had getting it all ready! We little thought how well it would turn out.

MISS MATTY. More than twenty pounds! I did not think to make so much as that in the first year, by just the sale of tea alone. Twenty pounds!

MARY. And you were so afraid that you might be injuring other people's business.

MISS MATTY. Well, you see, dear, there was already Mr. Johnson in the town, who sold tea, as well as other things, and I did not feel quite comfortable about it till I had just run down to see him, and to inquire if it was likely to injure his trade; but he was very kind.

MARY (*aside*). Yes; and many a customer does Mr. Johnson send on to Miss Matty.

(*Shop bell rings. Enter two or more children.*)

CHILD. One ounce of almond comfits, please, ma'am.

(*Miss Matty weighs out four, then smiles and drops in a fifth.*)

MARY (*taking hold of Miss Matty's arm*): Miss Matty, that is overweight. There should be only four of those large almond comfits to the ounce.

MISS MATTY. All right, dear. That's just by way of make-weight.

MARY. But the fifth comfit weighs a quarter of an ounce more!

(*Miss Matty only nods reassuringly, and the children go off with their packet.*)

MARY. I hope you do not get many children as customers, for every sale of comfits is a loss to your pocket.

MISS MATTY. The little things like it so much.

MARY. But too many may make them ill. Almond comfits are very unwholesome.

MISS MATTY. Are they indeed? Ah, then I must be sure and give them a few peppermint or ginger lozenges as well, next time. They must have something to please them. You know, dear, I like the children best. That is one good thing about selling comfits. It tempts the little things to come. Not but what I like the women too, who come to buy tea. It is such a good thing, dear—I don't think *men* ever buy tea; and it is of men particularly that I am afraid. They have such sharp, loud ways with them, and they do up accounts and count their change so quickly.

MARY. Who is that, I wonder, going

past? Now he is standing just opposite the door, and is staring up at it. I believe he is trying to read the name over the door, which we have hidden so carefully: "Matilda Jenkyns, licensed to sell tea." Now he has got out a double eyeglass!

MISS MATTY. Oh, I do hope he won't come in. A man always makes me quite nervous. I expect he has got a banknote or a sovereign that he wants me to give change for, and I do so dislike counting out change.

(*Enter Mr. Peter Jenkyns. He looks at Mary, and then earnestly at Miss Matty, puckering up his face, and drumming on the table with his fingers.*)

MISS MATTY (*nervously*). Do you want anything, sir?

MR. PETER (*turning sharply to Mary*). Is your name Mary Smith?

MARY. Yes, sir. (*Aside*): It is!! It is Mr. Peter! Her own brother! Oh, how will Miss Matty stand such a joyful shock?

MR. PETER (*having looked round the shop as if in search of something to buy, points to the glass of almond comfits*). Will you give me a pound of those things?

MISS MATTY (*horrified*). A pound!—a whole pound of almond comfits! Oh, sir,

think—— (*recognizing him, as he smiles at her*). It is—oh, sir! Can you be Peter?

(*Peter holds out his arms and they embrace.*)

MARY (*aside*). The best thing I can do is to leave them alone. (*Exit.*)

MR. PETER (*putting Miss Matty into a chair*). I have been too sudden for you, Matty—I have, my little girl.

MISS MATTY (*looking earnestly at him*). I suppose hot climates age people very quickly. When you left Cranford you had not a grey hair in your head.

MR. PETER. But how many years ago is that?

MISS MATTY. Ah, true! Yes; I suppose you and I are getting very old. But still, I did not think we were so very old. (*As if afraid of having hurt him.*) But white hair is very becoming to you, Peter.

MR. PETER. I suppose I forgot dates too, Matty; for what do you think I have brought for you from India? I have an Indian muslin gown, and a pearl necklace for you somewhere in my chest at Portsmouth!

(*He smiles at the idea of the incongruity, but Miss Matty looks pleased.*)

MISS MATTY. An Indian muslin gown—and a pearl necklace! (*She puts her hand up to her throat; then adds more sadly*) I'm afraid I'm too old. But it was very kind of you to think of it. They are just what I should have liked years ago—when I was young.

MR. PETER. So I thought, my little Matty. I remembered your tastes; they were so like my dear mother's. (*They clasp each other's hands silently. Enter Mary.*)

MR. PETER (*starting up*). I must go and settle about a room at the *George*. My carpet bag is there.

MISS MATTY (*in great distress*). No! you must not go away; please, dear Peter—pray, Mary—oh, you must not go!

MARY. Please, Mr. Peter, stay here in her house. We can manage perfectly.

MR. PETER. Well, well. As you like, as you like. We shall have so much to talk about, eh? Do you know, little Matty, I could have sworn you were on the high road to matrimony when I left England that last time! If anybody had told me then you would have lived and died an old maid I should have laughed in their faces. (*Miss Matty is silent.*)

MR. PETER. It was Holbrook, that fine, manly fellow, that I used to think would carry off my little Matty. You would not think it now, I dare say, Miss Mary, but this sister of mine was once a very pretty girl—at least, I thought so, and so I've a notion did poor Holbrook. What business had he to die before I came home to thank him for all his kindness to a good-for-nothing cub as I was? It was that that made me first think he cared for you; for in all our fishing expeditions it was Matty, Matty, we talked about. Poor Deborah! What a lecture she read me on having asked him home to lunch one day, when she had seen the Arley carriage in the town, and thought that my lady might call. Well, that's long years ago—more than half a lifetime, and yet it seems like yesterday! I don't know a fellow I should have liked better as a brother-in-law. You must have played your cards badly, my little Matty, somehow or another—wanted your brother to be a good go-between, eh, little one? (*Taking her hand.*) Why, what's this? You're shivering and shaking, Matty! Come, come! It's too cold for you down here. Let us go and sit in another room. Oh, never mind

the shop. We'll close that now, at once, and get the house straight again. And these things (*taking up a jar of comfits*), I shouldn't wonder if we can dispose of them somehow. Toss them out of the window for the children to catch! Eh! Come along, Miss Mary; lead the way (*drawing Miss Matty's arm through his*). Come and hear all my adventures. I've had plenty worth the telling, I assure you. Come along, come along! (*Exit.*)

END OF SCENE.

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